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COVER: Michael Morcock's warrior, Elric of Melnibone as painted by Michael Whelan for "Stormbringer." ABOVE: Kevin Sorbo, television's popular Hercules, stars as Robert E. Howard's barbarian king in Universal Pictures' Kull the Conqueror. *See story page 18.*

REALMS OF FANTASY

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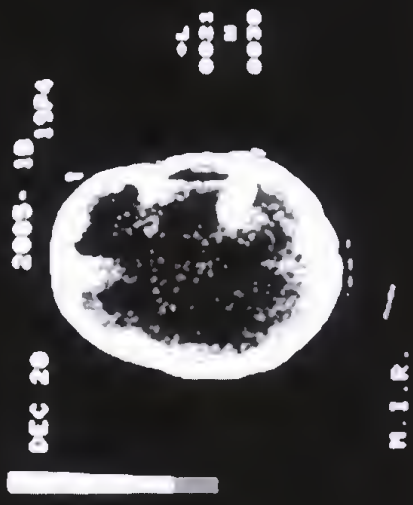
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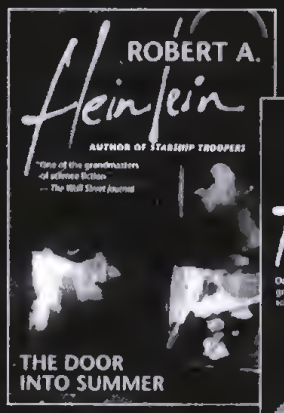
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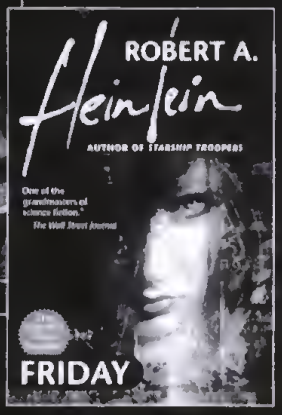
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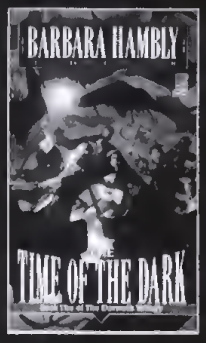


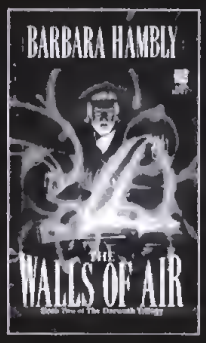




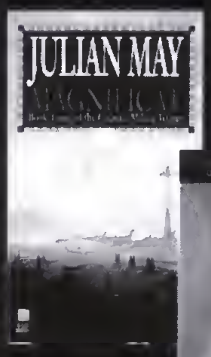


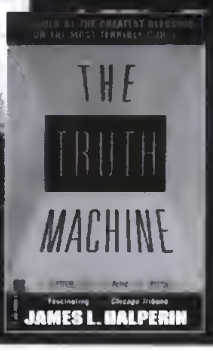


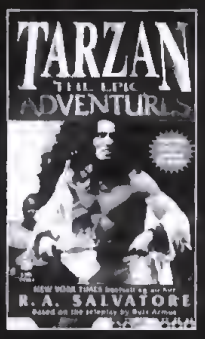












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Beauty, Terror, and Artistic Arrest

"Why do you read that stuff?" many of us are asked. Those who don't read fantasy often don't understand why we would want to read about places that don't exist, populated with creatures that can't exist, doing things that can't happen. We might struggle with an answer, mentioning how exciting fantasy is, how it allows us to use our imagination, how in fantasy anything can happen. Or, if we've faced this attitude too many times before, we might simply shrug and walk away. But whatever our response, it often seems to be lacking something, to be inadequate to describe the true appeal of fantasy. And that's because it's very hard even for us to articulate why, exactly, we are so drawn to fantasy fiction.

In his essay "On Fairy-Stories," J.R.R. Tolkien says that fantasy deals with "the adventures of men in the Perilous Realm." This "Perilous Realm" is a place he calls Faerie, the location where a fantasy takes place, an enchanted land that cannot be described directly: "Faerie cannot be caught in a net of words; for it is one of its qualities to be indescribable."

By Faerie, Tolkien does not mean some sort of pretty fairyland, with little pink sprites flying from flower to flower singing songs. He means something more powerful, more elemental. But what, exactly? If it can't be described in words, how the heck can I explain to my husband why I want to visit this place instead of cleaning the house?

While most authors and critics shy away from an exact definition of Faerie, most agree that this land must contain two elements: beauty and terror.

Beauty seems pretty easy to explain. Who wouldn't want to take a vacation to a beautiful place, to see the sunset-tinted heights of a mountain range or experience the peaceful beauty of a still mountain lake? And the beauty of Faerie is even greater. Again, we should not mistake cuteness for beauty. Faerie is not the land where the Smurfs live. The beauty of Faerie is a beauty that transcends our world. It is something we can only experience in our minds (which may explain the failure of most fantasy movies).

But why must Faerie contain terror? And if it does, why do we want to visit this Perilous Realm? Excitement? Perhaps. But I think there's more to it than that. If the beauty we see truly is transcendent, greater than anything we've experienced, sublime, then it will create in us a feeling of awe, that overwhelming sense of mixed wonder and dread we feel in the face of greatness that surpasses our understanding. And I think this is the emotion we all wish to feel when we read a fantasy.

Awe is a powerful emotion, equal parts wonder and terror, and it is a signal to us that we have reached Faerie, that we have reached the truly unknown, the truly fantastical, the truly imagined. Awe strikes us and overwhelms us, and it runs deep into our hearts with an intensity few emotions have.

One of the reasons awe is so powerful and so desirable is because it works on the deepest level in which a work of art—a story, in this case—can affect us. A truly great work of art causes a reaction in us called "artistic arrest." This term is used most often with paintings and sculpture, but it is equally valid in a discussion of stories. Artistic arrest occurs when the art seizes and holds you. It's that moment when your mind engages the story and you enter into the creative process, recreating the artist's images in your own mind; the moment of revelation when you say, "A-ha!"; the moment when you feel the same emotions that the artist felt, and those emotions are so overwhelming that you are literally stopped. Arrested. I can think of no better description of awe, or of the distinctive pleasure associated with reading fantasy.

This suggests an intimate bond between fantasy and art. Not only can a fantasy story be great art; the entire genre of fantasy stories is in some sense focused on creating the essence of great art, through the emotion of awe and its resulting artistic arrest. And we, as readers of fantasy, are searching for great art, and for that transcendent experience it provides.

So the next time someone asks you, "Why do you read that stuff?" you might try answering, "To experience beauty, terror, and artistic arrest." This still won't get you out of cleaning the house, but it may make your questioner start to wonder what he's missing.

—Jeanne Cavelos

Dear Ms. McCarthy;

I am a magazine journalism major at the University of Florida. I am writing an article on Black science fiction and fantasy authors for one of my classes, and was hoping you might be able to comment on the subject.

I'd like to add that this project is not just an assignment for me, I'm a twenty-five year old Black woman who hopes to join the meager ranks — the most recent information I have numbers only five Black authors of speculative fiction, with Octavia Butler as the only woman.

I've been writing since I was eight or nine, and I've almost always encountered discouragement toward my fiction.

The usual pattern, especially since transferring to UF, is a patronizing, pseudo-liberal exhortation against "wasting (my) time with this weak crutch of genre writing" and ignoring (my) deep and rich cultural heritage (that is an actual quote from a creative writing professor). Or, the more direct proclamation that "writing sci-fi and fantasy is simply not something that Black people do (another actual quote from a student).

Naturally, I haven't listened to any of this if anything it has fueled my ambitions. But I've never really been in contact with anyone in the industry, and I'd like to find out — for myself and other hopefuls, what the "pros" actually think on the subject.

Sincerely,
T.L. Favors
Ocala, FL.

Well, naturally we "pros" here at Realms *believe fantasy to be deep, richly entertaining and often thought provoking as well as infused with cultural spirit and tradition. We don't care what gloomy professors and jealous students say — and we're glad to hear you don't either! As far as Black science fiction and fantasy writers, specifically female, Octavia Butler is the only writer we are familiar with as well. Hopefully, the next time someone asks this question we can add the name T.L. Favors to a growing list. Any readers with information for Ms. Favors please feel free to contact us at* Realms, *and we will pass the info along.*

Dear Ms. McCarthy;

This letter is in response to Reynir H. Stefansson's letter which appeared in *Realms of Fantasy*, Volume 3, Number 4.

As the illustrator of the short story "Holding Pattern," appearing in *ROF*, Volume 3, Number 2, and as an avid reader of this magazine, I appreciate and share Mr. Stefansson's concern for accuracy in the detail of the Piper Cub airplane.

While the exact year and model of the Piper Cub in my illustration might vary from the plane's description in the story, it was designed from photographic reference material found in technical sources on piper Cubs.

Additionally, as one of the many individuals on the creative team who produced this finished work, I was required to translate the story from a literary medium to a pictorial medium. It is customary in the publishing industry for the illustrator to use "artistic license" to present his/her impression of the written material. My rendition is my interpretation of the elements within the story.

I thank Mr. Stefansson for his observations and for viewing my illustration in such great depth. As a professional illustrator, it's rewarding to know that so many fans are buying *ROF*, reading the stories and showing such a keen interest in the artwork.

Sincerely,
Lawrence Ronald
Artist/Illustrator
West Seneca, NY

Thank you for your letter Mr. Ronald. It's nice to have communication between our writers and artists and their fans and/or critics. We are glad that you took the time to answer this particular letter, and I know our readers will be pleased as well. I think it is also gratifying to know that artists and writers who contribute to this magazine are avid readers of Realms.

Dear Shawna;

I would like to comment on Terri Windling's Cinderella essay if I may. There is a version much earlier than the Chinese, I believe. It is a tale that comes from Egypt. A young slave girl was washing laundry at the riverside and had removed fur slippers. An eagle flying overhead saw them, swooped down, taking one in its talons, and flew off. Discovering that the slipper was not an animal, the eagle dropped the slipper, which fell in front of a pharaoh. He saw this as a sign from the gods, and gave orders that whoever the slipper fit would be his bride, and married the slave girl.

In some of the French versions, it is the Virgin Mary who acts as the girl's protector. This would have been politically dangerous in a Protestant country, like England, and Cinderella has since had a fairy godmother. An early example of political correctness?

Best wishes,
John R. Oram
Cambridge, England

Dear Shawna:

Back in May I wrote you a letter voicing my dissatisfaction with certain aspects of *ROF*. I was very blunt and abundant with my criticisms in that letter; I felt I had sufficient reason to do so. However, I pride myself on my objectivity and I am equally willing to lavish effusive praise when I feel it is warranted.

"Scapegoat" moved me almost to the point of tears — in public, no less. Charles De Lint's piece was mesmerizing. "Nairich" drew me in and wouldn't let go even after I finished it. Don Webb's "The Beautiful Wassilissa" is the best retelling of the Baba Yaga fairy tale I have ever read, bar none. Last but not least, Geoffrey Landis delivers yet another wry masterful piece of storytelling.

If all issues were of this October 1996 issue's caliber, I would have no complaints whatsoever. I would even be happy to pay $30.00 or more for a monthly subscription of *ROF* as John Mitchell suggested in his letter to you. However, one issue of this quality does not a subscription make, but if you keep up this level of excellence you'll definitely have a lot more regular readers among the speculative fiction fans I associate with. I'll even go so far as to say you will get a good many of us back as subscribers.

So, with that in mind I will close out this letter. Consider what I have said here (and in my previous letter) in the spirit it was intended. Hopefully October's pleasant surprise wasn't a fluke. All the best and continued success to you and your staff.

Sincerely,
Bryan A. Bushemi
Orland Park, IL

To Shawna McCarthy, Wayne Barlowe (and Tanith Lee too!);

Sorry to hear those loose factions in the publishing world kept Wayne Barlowe from *ROF*'s pages prior to your February 1997 issue. I wish to emphasize that regardless of any marital connections — his work, without a doubt, stands on its own merit. And merit is really such a lame word but I can't think of another at the moment.

In fact, Tanith Lee's descriptions of Wayne Barlowe's artwork took the words right out of my mouth (yeah, I wish)! Tanith's eloquent words were a fine accompaniment to Mr. Barlowe's chilling, powerful artwork. "Wargate" is an extraordinary picture and I could not stare at "Sargatanas" for long lest he appear in my dreams.

Shawna, I do hope to see more of your husband's artwork in the pages of *ROF*. Just want to mention that I am always excited to read anything by Ms. Lee, and I find your letter-replies and editorials very amusing.

Alanna O'Rourke
Boston, MA

Your letters and comments are welcome. Make sure you mark them as letters or they're likely to get mixed in with writers' guidelines requests. Send them to: Letters to the Editor, Realms of Fantasy, *P.O. Box 527, Rumson, NJ 07760. Or better yet, E-mail: s.mccarthy@genie.geis.com.*

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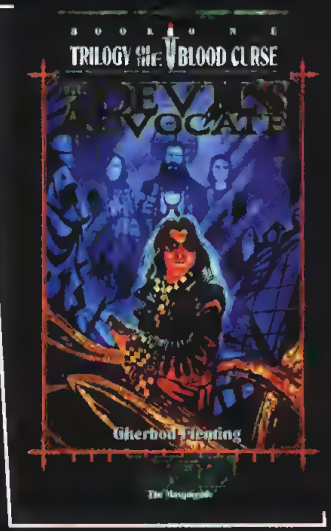
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BY GAHAN WILSON

A wizard returns with his appalling army of darkness in Kar Kalim.

MAKE NO MISTAKE: I LOVE SCIENCE, ABSOLUTELY ADORE IT, AM GRATEFUL BEYOND measure for its endless bounty and am ongoingly fascinated and inspired by its ever more astounding revelations.

I have mentioned the long commute I take every Tuesday is barely noticed because that day's *New York Times* contains a terrific science section packed with well-written, meaty articles. I dive into it with the eagerness of a frog diving into a shiny new pond and I seldom emerge before the sparkling deco towers of Gotham hove into view. It is a weekly romp of the mind I treasure profoundly.

So that's my attitude toward science. Thoroughly positive.

Some scientists, now, that's another matter. That's a little trickier. The best ones, the real ones, spotting and pointing out totally new stuff which the rest of us would have overlooked entirely put me in mind of poets. They look around kind of bug-eyed, using their hands to fill in what they can't articulate (poets are the ones who can articulate) and often seem in a state of dazzlement at day to day existence. They are wild to explore and to figure out and to futz around with the universe.

Peter S. Beagle's Giant Bones *collects six novellas set in the same fantasy world as his bestselling novel,* The Innkeepers Song. Cover art by Tony DiTerlizza.



It's this last part, the futzing, that worries me. It focused for me years ago when I was watching some taped interview with Robert J. Oppenheimer. Once, when I was a kid, I was on a passenger plane carrying Oppenheimer and apparently I was *the only person on the entire plane that recognized him!* None of the grownups gave him look two. It still boggles me.

Anyhow, the interview was filmed with "Oppie" standing outside, sky in the background, locks of his hair stirred faintly by passing breezes, he'd been pinned down (maybe in another airport) by reporters who asked him what his worst doubt or fear might have been before igniting the first atomic bomb.

He stared up and ahead (likely at some more sky) and bemusedly admitted that there *were* some concerns among him and his fellow scientists that the thing might start a chain reaction with the surrounding atmosphere and destroy us all. There was a noticeable pause before the next question which I recall personally breaking by dropping my jaw onto the carpet before the television set.

The second thing that worries me about scientists is their aversion to the specific which comes, very understandably, from their contention that nothing is provable (lay term: "real") until it can be shown to be repeatable. All events taking place only once are dismissed as "anecdotal" and therefore worthless from a scientific point of view. The great problem with this is that *positively everything takes place only once!*

Going for the abstract instead of the specific appears to cause many scientists to float further and further away from immediate reality. Of course the perspective thus given does provide a marvelously wide view of the cosmos in general, one denied to those preoccupied with ordinary peerings at the very nearby, but, in certain of its practitioners, it does seem to lead to a strange detachment from the day to day business of living and breathing.

The creepiest and most clear cut demonstration I've seen of this phenomenon—and I've encountered in this precise form a number of times both in interviews and in actual discussions—is when an obviously bright, if not actually brilliant scientist eagerly hopes aloud that he or she will hang on long enough to his or her physical form

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for technology to develop to the point where he or she can be recorded electronically and thereby live forever! To me this is not only an exposure of a lack of consciousness of actually being which is not only terrifying in itself, but is also an appallingly good explanation of why one might be able to view with considerable equanimity setting off a device which one felt might actually bring about the end of the world.



Thomas A. Easton explores and develops the science fiction implications of what might happen if people taken with this weird notion were in a position to put it into effect in his highly entertaining novel ***Silicon Karma*** *(White Wolf Publishing, Clarkston, GA; 285 pages; trade paperback 11.99).* I confess I dived into it initially in eager hopes he was going to explore the truly profound lunacy of confusing one's self with a recording of one's self as the Kafkaesque possibilities of all this struck me (and strike me still) as highly promising but, as it turned out, Easton had not written that sort of a book.

No matter, he may not have written *that* book but he has written a really good one. He does make sure the reader (and the characters) do get it through their heads that it will only be the electronic *copy* which lives on, but having established that fact he basically leaves the philosophic and psychological aspects of the notion behind and goes ahead to produce an amusingly imaginative vision of what might happen technically once the knack of copying human beings onto tapes or discs or whatever is achieved.

One very important and really neat notion Easton comes up with is that the copiers of these humans will probably decide the handiest thing to do with those copies will be to stash them in a copy of this world. I think all of the real scientists I mentioned earlier envisioned their electronic selves continuing to participate in the real world (which Easton refers to as the "meat" world), probably chatting to us from metal boxes or possibly even androids, but I don't think it crossed their innocent minds this would very soon lead to yet another population explosion, and one which the meat inhabitants of Earth would soon find highly bothersome. Easton's guess is highly likely leads to some excellent science fiction.

The world is richly worked out and detailed and the interactions between it and its often badly-confused human copies developed convincingly. The software controlling the machine which produces and maintains the world handles its major interactions with the inhabitants in the form of avatars which usually appear in agreeable human form so that they can instruct and assist comprehensibly and with as little stress as possible. These avatars are restricted in their powers by built-in Assimovian Ten Commandment-style limitations, and of course Easton follows the grand tradition regarding such commandments by working out clever ways to circumvent them. More routine interactions between the inhabitants and the machine controlling their world involve Pop-ups, usually personified as grotesque little puppets in the guise of waiters, doormen and so on, which materialize out of table tops and sidewalks to take orders.

Though the inhabitants are not meat they are subject to certain meat world vulnerabilities, albeit with electronic spins. The most dramatic of these is that they can be—and now and then are—killed. The great difference is that they can be rebooted. The drawback of that operation is that they will be rebooted in the exact condition they enjoyed directly after their last backup—slangily referred to as a B-cup—which means, among other things, that they will retain absolutely no memory of whatever happened between that B-cup and the reboot and the likelihood of there being a long space between B-cups is greatly enhanced by the fact that some programmer with a dry sense of humor made it so that B-cups leave one with a horrible lingering aftertaste in the mouth and a persistently thumping ache in the head.

All of this above complex is amusing, superior science fiction thinking and *Silicon Karma* is packed with many other generous imaginings of the same high quality. Easton extrapolates cleverly and interestingly on how all sorts of meat world doings might fare if they were to be adapted into a computer program and it turns out that love and lust, economics and spiritual matters including an Edenic return and divers afterlives for

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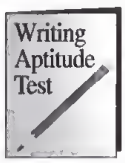
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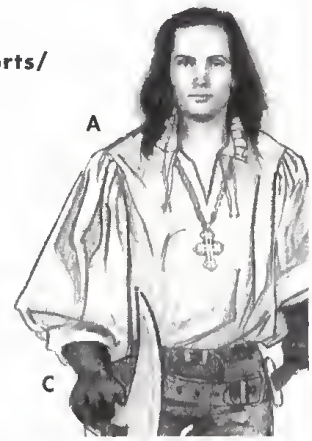
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Aha—but what if someone gets greedy and starts gobbling precious memory? What if the boundaries between this world and our own are violated...*both* ways? Suppose someone knew how to burn you with a cigar from across the room whilst you are naked in a cage? Easton answers all these intriguing questions along with several dozen I haven't brought up such as how would a rather sketchy computerized version of a city street look like, anyhow?

Very good fun.

Kar Kalim *by Deborah Christian (Tor Books, NYC: 320 pages; hardcover $23.95)* has all the usual trappings of fantasy in abundance, all brought onstage in essentially traditional form and interacting according to the ancient rules set down by fabulists of yore. There are wizards aplenty, they are served by legions of spirits, armies of brutish entities and one of the best dragons I've encountered in some while, namely one made of night mist who blows chill fog instead of fire from its mouth.

There are also fabulous kingdoms, legendarily potent jewels, gorgeous palaces housing highly impressive royals, an extremely satisfying magician's tower and, of course, any number of spells, charms, runic circles and necromantic gewgaws.

All of these elements are most adroitly introduced and handled by Christian, joined or set against one another in the unfoldments of a great, spreading battle between the forces of Light and Darkness, and I am confident almost all readers who enjoy the classical fantastic will have a fine time with *Kar Kalim.*

The hero of the tale is the seeress R'Inyalushni d'aal, more familiarly know as Inya, an ancient woman of power who dwells in *Saahnmorsk,* which may be translated as Moontooth, a tall tower positively teeming with secret panels, cosmic gates, chapels, temples, libraries of lore, helpful spirits some of who are only dimly visible—the sort of little hideaway any subscriber of *Realms,* and most certainly your obedient contributor, would love to have stashed away for long weekends and possibly eventual retirement.

Inya has purloined Moontooth from its original location to another realm for interesting reasons I will leave you to discover when you read the book, and for long generations she and it have been awesome local landmarks and the object of many pilgrimmages by seekers of assistance of wisdom or comfort.

One night the tower and Inya are visited by a darkly handsome young man, Murl Amrey, a cheeky young mage sent to the seeress by his instructor Clavius Mericus of Burris, now a thaumaturge of renown, years ago, as a young man, a student and lover of R'Inyalushni d'aal.

It should be explained at this point that Inya is ageless and still possesses in full the same striking beauty which enthralled Clavius those long years ago.

When Amrey explains that Clavius has had him come to her in hopes she would further his magical education, at first Inya is hesitant. It is obvious the youth is full of himself, likely a real piece of work all around, but she decides to take him on a trial basis because her old associate Cladius has asked it, and, besides, there is no denying Murl Amrey is indeed a handsome young man.

In a very short time it becomes clear to Inya that all her various suspicions were well founded. Soon their relationship becomes both intimate and combative. The youth is a clearly talented magicians, a more than acceptable lover, and a lot of trouble and, increasingly, perhaps even a downright threat.

Eventually she sends him off to the bleak and barbaric planet of Styrcia, easily reached from one of Moontooth's cosmic gates, under the pretense it is merely a routine test in her magical curriculum. Actually she envisages the quest will result in one of two perfectly acceptable results: either he will not survive the numerous menaces offered by Styrcia—outstandingly the dog-like, long-fanged karsdagi—and she will be rid of him in that fashion, or his efforts will succeed and result in her possessing one of the legendary magic-enhancing gemstones for which the grim place is famous and she will instantly have such power as will easily leave her upstart student's burgeoning necromancy far, far behind.

Unhappily for Inya she has seriously underestimated the resourcefulness of young Murl Amrey and in a short time he returns 20 years older (you run into interesting little problems with time when you deal with cosmic gates), astoundingly fiercer and foxier, the leader of a huge, appalling army composed largely of the aforementioned karsdagi, and rechristened *Kar Kalim*, which can be adequately translated as "Ruler of Worlds."

In case you think I've told too much, let me assure you that all of this merely establishes the initial premise of Deborah Christian's story, only gets it started in directions which I found to be quite fresh in a fantasy of this kind for *Kar Kalim* takes, in a quiet way, a very innovative, and possibly even subversive pathways for this form of fiction.

I think you will enjoy it very much, but I think the turns it takes with the world of heroic fantasy and the subtly different perspectives it gives on such worlds, will not only refresh you, but cause much profitable reexamination of the premises behind such worlds. In a quiet way *Kar Kalim* is bracingly revolutionary.

I look forward to seeing what Deborah Christian does next and am curious to see what impact she will produce on other writers in the field.

It will be a good one, I think.

It is highly unlikely that Peter S. Beagle requires anything in the way of introduction to readers of this magazine. He, without any doubt, one of the main instigators of fantasy

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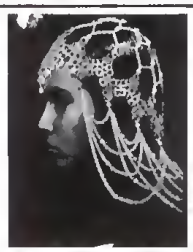
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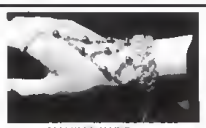
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writing as 'tis done today. *The Last Unicorn* and *A Fine and Private Place* are well entrenched among the accepted basic books in the genre and his later *The Innkeeper's Song* is also a certainty to be thus enshrined.

Beagle freely admits that ***Giant Bones***—a great title, that!—*(Roc Books, NYC; 269 pages; Trade Paperback $9.95)* is set in the world of Innkeeper in his foreword, which I enjoyed as much as anything in the book. He has a lot of good stuff to say in that foreword and I strongly advise any purchaser, borrower or stealer (as, regretfully, there are such) of the book to not only read but absorb. *Especially* any would-be writers of such books. Wise observations in that foreword, kindly warnings, and excellent advice.

The blurb on the back of the reviewer's print up of the book I received gives the usual comparisons. *Giant Bones* is claimed to call to mind both J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis. It has become standard to evoke J.R.R.T. and C.S.L. on blurbs of fantasy books, positively automatic, and very often the evocation is so inappropriate as to be downright egregious.

Here, with a writer of Beagle's strengths and abilities, the evocation is not (as it often is) positively insulting to the memories of the above-mentioned duo, it is simply inaccurate.

Outside of its being a fantasy set in a fantasy world (what you might call a pretty broad category!), *Bones* does not, at least to me, evoke either of the two scholars' highly Oxfordian approach at all. In sharp contrast to these other writers, *Bones* is a brawler of a book, wine-soaked, a purpose full of crude folks and images and proudly earthy. All of these are excellent attributes and lead to a hardy, bawdy kind of fantasy, but surely a kind totally divergent from either Tolkien's or Lewis' stately tellings.

Both Lewis and Tolkien are firmly and confessedly of highly organized, absolutely Christian faith and from their most superficial imagery all the way down to their deepest emotional and philosophical urgings, this orientation is clearly visible. It really is the power and source of their strength and, like Charles Williams and others of the Inklings (if you don't know about the Inkling for heaven's sake *learn* about them and increase your enjoyment of all of their writings) they were and would be the first to announce the fact. From a pulpit if need be.

Beagle's imagings, now, are very obviously written by a pagan. For all I know, in day to day life, he may be a sunday to to meeting Methodist (though I seriously doubt it) but the fellow that wrote *Bones* smells of woodmould and peasant sweat. He's out there on the windy heath, working his magic amid tall, rough-hewn stones, precipitously leaning and very muddy at their bases. His rites are lit by flickering fires fed by twigs and bracken and blown this way and that by the cold wind from the woods and stretching fields beyond. Not for him the straight-rising columns of incense and steadily upright can-

dle flames as are found in the near draughtless transepts of the churches of Tolkien and Lewis. His enthusiastic magi are happy to work in flapping rags and would find the immaculate, gold-woven, well-ironed robes of priests uncomfortable beyond description.

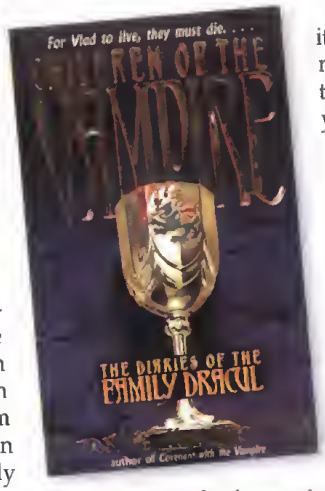
My apologies for the diatribe but all this inaccurate evoking of poor old Tolkien and Lewis *does* get one down and is both an insult to them and a very strong indication the evokers haven't really bothered to understand the writer they're trying to praise. I feel better for the outburst and will probably be able to avoid another of the kind for at least several months.

As for *Bones*, I hope you've gathered I think it a fine brawler of a book. The stories are all ballads beautifully sung and they will set you dreaming for certain. It's silly to pick out favorites and (particularly with a short story) to go into plots and surprises.

Just buy the *Giant Bones* and I'd appreciate it if you would, not for me as much as for yourself, put your thumb on your nose and wave your fingers at that silly blurb.

I seriously think it'll help you enjoy the book.

— Gahan Wilson



Children of the Vampire: The Diaries of the Family Dracul; by Jeanne Kalogridis; Dell, NY; 368 pp.; mass market paperback; $5.99

The Diaries of the Family Dracul trilogy attempts a very difficult task: to create a backstory for Bram Stoker's *Dracula* that deepens and increases our enjoyment of that classic. And it succeeds. *Children of the Vampire*, the second book in the trilogy, takes place in the years approaching the events in Dracula, and tells the story of Dracula and his descendents. If you've ever wondered why Dracula is immortal, you'll get your answer here, and it will haunt you. It seems that when, as a mortal, Dracula sensed he was going to die, he made a pact with the

Continued on page 74

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God's Fires, by Patricia Anthony, Ace hardcover $22.95. The divine mission of an inquisitor-general, confessions, virgin births. A supreme work of speculative fiction set in Portugal where a strange acorn-shaped ship has fallen from the sky and God speaks to the king. The ship has given forth creatures, perhaps to tempt those of true faith. Be they angels or devils?

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BY DAN PEREZ

Robert E. Howard's barbarian king comes to the silver screen.

THE FERTILE, FEVERISH IMAGINATION OF TEXAS PULP WRITER ROBERT E. HOWARD (WHOSE story was fictionalized in the recent film *The Whole Wide World*) gave birth to a number of bold adventurers, the best known of whom was first committed to film 15 years ago in *Conan the Barbarian*, a movie that made an international star of Austrian bodybuilder Arnold Schwarzenegger. Now another Howard sword and sorcery hero is about to appear on the big screen, starring Kevin Sorbo,who is already an international star thanks to his title role in the smash syndicated hit *Hercules: the Legendary Journeys*. In *Kull the Conqueror*, Sorbo plays Kull, a barbarian mercenary who seizes the throne of a mad king after slaying him, only to fall victim himself to the treacheries of scheming nobles and an ancient, beautiful witch (Tia Carrere). The story, based on a collection of Howard's Kull stories published in 1967, unites the deposed Kull with a slave girl (Carrina Lombard) and a priest (Litefoot), and the trio embark on a quest to find a legendary magic known as the Breath of Valka to help defeat the witch before she can awaken her disciples and work even more evil. The film was produced by Rafaella De Laurentiis, scripted by Charles Pogue *(Dragonheart)* and directed by John Nicoletta, who directed the Vanishing Son miniseries.

Television's Hercules, *Kevin Sorbo, stars as a barbarian warrior who overthrows an evil king in this summer's fantasy film.*



"Well, I'm not going to kid myself," says Kevin Sorbo of landing the role as Kull, "I'm sure the success of *Hercules* kind of opened the door for me to even be considered for the role. Because as similar as the characters are, what people are going to think the characters are, they are that much different as well. But there's still that same sort of action-adventure mythological world of Hercules compared to the mystical sorcery world of Kull, there are parallels within them. And I'm sure that Rafaella De Laurentiis and Universal looked at those, and they said, 'look, this show is a hit.' The show is huge all over the world so I'm sure that is why I was considered. I had a screen test, though, so it wasn't handed to me. So I was given the script and I did my homework on it, got into L.A. on one of my breaks a couple of years back. I did a big screen test and about six months later they offered me the role. And we had about a year of preparation."

Sorbo, calling from New Zealand during a break in filming *Hercules*, says he hadn't read the Howard novel before taking on the role. "Was I aware of Kull and aware of Conan? Certainly. And I saw Arnold in all the Conan ones he did and once I got the part I grabbed everything and read, to sort of get inside the character and see what it was all about. I did that actor thing, you know. But it was fun. For me, it's fascinating, because I saw a lot of comic books as I grew up as a kid. I did all the comic book stuff. It was sort of fun to relive that childhood experience."

"I knew of Robert E. Howard," says director John Nicoletta *(Vanishing Son)* who came to the movie project through an association with De Laurentiis, "I'd read his works years ago — not

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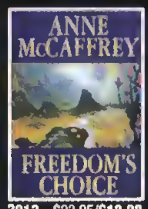
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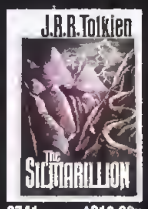
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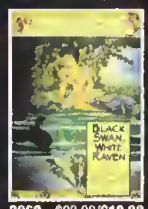
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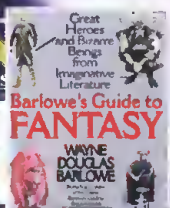


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After seizing the throne, Kull finds being himself surrounded by the treachery of scheming nobles. The film was largely shot in Slovakia, using many of the same facilities as Dragonheart.

recently. And he'd also done Conan, and I was familiar with that. But [Kull] isn't like that. It's quite different. I mean, when they did Conan, they were dealing with an NC-17 or an X rating, and they fought like hell to get it to an R. This on the first screening is a PG-13, so it's a very different audience, and a different movie. I had to kill 1500 people without a drop of blood. A lot of 'Ew! Ah! Oh!' So it's a different kind of a movie."

"The violence was taken out quite a bit," Sorbo says, "which will probably be disappointing to people; they're going to go 'aw, they sold out.' (laughs) It was made more along the lines of making it family friendly, too. The violence is certainly there: the fight scenes are huge and elaborate and done, I think, very well. But you don't see heads rolling down the steps, you don't see anything lopped off, and that's certainly Howard's way. But it was taken out of here to try and get children to be able to see the film. I think it's a smart move and I think it's a good move. I think this is the type of movie that the entire family could go see.

When asked about the inevitable comparisons between Hercules and Kull, Sorbo laughs and says, "They both have long hair!" To him, the similarity ends there. Kull is, he notes, "much darker. Yes, they're heroes, but they're heroes on totally different sides of the spectrum of what that definition of a hero would entail. Because [Kull] is a much darker person. He has a lot more skeletons in his closet, so to speak.

"For me, from an actor's standpoint, it was a kick to play someone like this because Hercules is kind of a goody two-shoes, let's face it. Yeah, he can get mad and things like this, but [Kull] has got a chip on his shoulder throughout. I think Hercules teaches by example, and this guy has to basically learn and absorb everything. I mean, he's much more raw — a far more intense person. From a lady's perspective, I'd think they'd probably be much more attracted to Kull than they would Hercules. You know, women tend to kind of like that bad boy image more than they like the goody two-shoes. He's just a nastier guy, and he was a lot more fun to play."

Kull the Conqueror was shot in Slovakia, using many of the same locations and facilities as *Dragonheart*. I love to travel," says Sorbo, "so I was blown away by the fact that I was finally going to get to an Eastern European country, because I'd lived in Europe for three and a half years, but the closest I got to Czechoslovakia, which it was then before they split into two countries, was Vienna — basically an hour away from where we were based in the town of Bratislava. You know, it didn't disappoint in terms of what you sort of had a feel for what Communism would have been about. You talk to the people there and there's a lot of bitterness. A lot of it is that they feel like they've been lied to for the last fifty years, which they have. I mean, what's Communism? It just strips hope from you anyway. There's certainly a desire to get into the modern world, so to speak. You really step into a time zone there. You see the practicality of the wonderful Russian architecture there, you know? (laughs) Four straight walls — there, comrade, this is good. It's kind of bad, in a way.

Still, Sorbo found the location to his liking. "It was beautiful. You know, I'm not an expert at it but I'm an avid student of history, and different cultures, and we studied far

eastern studies during the world wars and all that kind of stuff, and you look at these castles and they're thousands of years old. It just blows you away. There was one place, one castle where the history was so long with it that even Napoleon had been there and bombed the hell out of one thing. It was this castle called Devon that we shot quite a bit at. They have traces going back there for four or five thousand years, from the Romans, the Turks, the Greeks and this history is like, surreal. It's the only word I can come up with."

Sorbo noted that the most difficult aspect of the shoot was a familiar one. "Every movie's got the same complaint: sixteen, seventeen hour days, six days a week, with eight hour turnarounds between each day. I mean, it's get home, go to sleep, wake up and go back at it. And that, in itself, became a grind for everybody. It's tough under those conditions to stay friendly the whole time. (laughs) By the seventh week, everyone was about ready to kill each other.

"But the crew itself: that was probably another problem. I don't mean that in a negative sense in terms of working with them; they were wonderful people, but we had about seven different languages going around the set. We had Croatian, Slovakian, Greek, German, Italian, English, Polish — we had so many different languages going that the communication was always a problem. I mean, the director would say 'I want this' from the extras and when we got down the road to '... and action!', you know, nothing happened that the director thought was going to happen. Or the actors, for that much, so that was a constant problem, but all in all, as grueling a schedule as it was, I think that things kinda clipped along at a pretty good pace."

Sorbo notes that while he is still enthusiastic about the success of Hercules, he's ready for a change of pace, as well. "Oh, god yes! I'm ready to cut the hair! You know what? It just made logical sense to me: I had three films offered to me in the hiatus of last year, so we looked at all three. I got together with my manager, my agent and my lawyers, and we got the team together and we kind of sat around and hemmed and hawwed and I met Rafaella and for me, that was it. Rafaella De Laurentiis is great, and she's a classy lady and she is a person that loves the profession. She likes actors. There are so many people in the profession that are in it for the business part that it was nice to meet a producer that likes actors. So she sold me on it, and there wasn't that much to sell; I just gelled with her. We hit it off and I felt comfortable with her and I felt the script was far and away the best one offered to me. She had everything in place: the team was in place, the money was in place, everything was ready to go. So it was sort of a no-brainer that as my first feature, why not do something that is somewhat similar? I can't fight the comparisons: it's gonna happen. And it just made more sense.



Tia Carrere plays Akivasha, an ancient witch with evil intentions.

"But for my next film, I've got a couple of things on the plate right now that I may or may not do. I may take my three months off — I haven't had a break since October of 1993 so I'm a little burnt out right now. And I may want to take those three months off and just golf, play basketball and kick back. I don't know yet. I will do something definitely different. But will it be action? Probably, because that's all studios are going to give me a chance to do right now. That's sort of where dinner's being set down, and people don't want to give me a romantic comedy at this point. But can I do it? Damn straight I believe I can do it. Otherwise I wouldn't be an actor. That's just another hoop I'm going to have to jump through when the time comes.

Sorbo is pragmatic enough to agree that typecasting could be a potential problem. "People put blinders on. Then I go to a party next week and I show up in a tuxedo with my hair slicked back and they go, 'yeah! You could play that, too, couldn't you?' You've got to hit them over the head to make them think of you in a different way. That's sort of the nature of the business."

Will *Hercules* fans flock to theaters to catch *Kull the Conqueror*? Sorbo says, "I hope that through the success of *Hercules*, it translates into success for *Kull* because of the audience, but certainly I hope that if *Kull* does become successful, it's also because of that bonus audience that likes that *Conan* type of a film. It hasn't been done in a long time. It's been fifteen or sixteen years since Arnold did the other one, so it's been a while since something like this has been out, and if it does do well, I'm hoping that those people who watch *Hercules* will tune in. And hopefully that they benefit each other."

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BY TERRI WINDLING

Myth, Mysticism, and Magic: The Pre-Raphaelites and Fantasy

"I MADE A NEW RELIGION," WROTE THE GREAT IRISH POET WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS," OF POETIC tradition, of a fardel of stories, and of personages, and of emotions, inseparable from their first expression, passed on from generation to generation by poets and painters. I wished for a world where I could discover this tradition perpetually, and not in pictures and poems only, but in tiles round the chimney-piece and in the hangings that kept out the draft."In 19th-century England, a group of idealistic men and women dreamed of creating such an ideal world–spinning their bright, richly colored dreams against the drab, smoky background of the Industrial Revolution. Although they came from different walks of life and different artistic disciplines, today we know them collectively as The Pre-Raphaelites. Some years ago Steven Brust asked me to give a talk about Pre-Raphaelite art at the 4th Street Fantasy Convention, held annually in Minneapolis. He explained that he wanted me to speak not only about the history of this art — but why it is that one encounters so many Pre-Raphaelite fans in the modern fantasy field. The following column, and the Gallery article on page 58, are both drawn from the 4th Street talk, and many conversations that followed it, about the lasting power of Pre-Raphaelite art to engage, enchant, and inspire.



"Queen Guinevere" is the only know painting by William Morris. The model, Jane Burden, married Morris and later modeled for, and became romantically involved with Pre-Raphaelite artist Dante Gabriel Rossetti.

For those unfamiliar with Pre-Raphaelitism, it is important to understand that this was not an artistic movement solely concerned with canvas and paint. It was a movement of artists whose paintings and designs were thoroughly entwined with stories: with ancient myths and medieval romance, with 18th- and 19th-century poetry, with the great heroic epics of the past and humble folk tales from the fireside. (Two of the most important artists of the movement–Rossetti and Morris — were equally famed as writers.) Furthermore, these artists were positively revolutionary in Victorian times for bringing their rich aesthetic ideals out of the painting galleries and into every aspect of daily life — from the clothes one wore to the chairs one sat on to the gorgeous handbound books from which one read Chaucer and Malory. It is this aesthetic, along with the paintings and prose, that has survived for over one hundred years, as compelling to some of us today as it was during Victoria's reign.

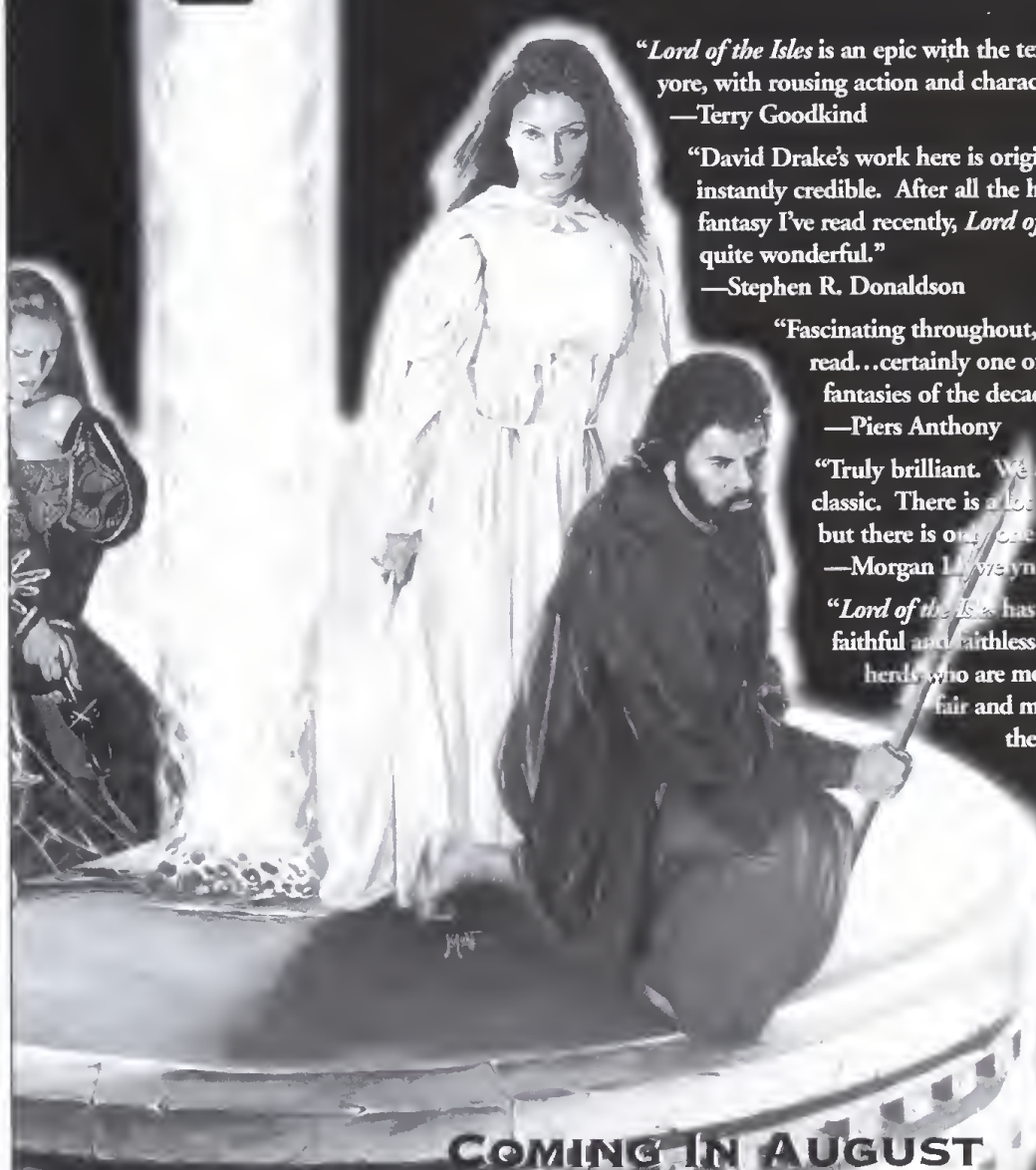
As I sit here now at my desk in a 16th-century English cottage — with Morris patterns on the wallpaper, the curtains and the cloth of my skirt; with Burne-Jones prints framed on the walls and Kelmscott facsimile editions on the shelves — I suppose I could have titled this column Confessions of a Pre-Raphaelite Wannabe — as a friend teasingly suggested this morning. Indeed, I plead guilty to a thorough fascination

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"The Briar Rose — The Prince Enters the Briar Wood" *is part of a series of paintings by Edward Burne-Jones based on the story of Sleeping Beauty.*

with the Pre-Raphaelites, but point out that it is one I share with a number of others in the fantasy field, including writers Michael Moorcock, Robert Holdstock, and Delia Sherman; artists Thomas Canty, Brian Froud, and Charles Vess, to name but a few. It seems that those of us drawn to this art are often drawn as well to its encompassing vision: the idea that art is not just something to look at but a way of life — a religion of Beauty, of Romanticism, that surrounds one (as Yeats would say) right down to the tiles round the chimney-piece.

The Pre-Raphaelite movement was officially begun in the middle of the last century by seven young artists, barely into their twenties at the time. Painting, as it was taught back then (at London's Royal Academy), was bound by a strict series of rules, formulas, and conventions that determined what these artists could paint and exactly how they could paint it. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, William Holman Hunt and John Millais were at the core of this group of friends who defied the art establishment by exhibiting subversive, scandalous paintings signed with the mysterious letters "PRB." The initials stood for the group's nom de guerre: the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. They chose this name because they worshipped early Italian and Flemish art — the art before Raphael. The Brotherhood never set out to mimic the style of this early art, but rather they sought to evoke a similar spirit of freedom and simplicity: primarily by the radical concepts of painting directly from nature, out-of-doors; and by painting with bright, translucent colors straight onto a white background (rather than with the subdued Academy palette, painted light on dark).

This hardly seems radical to us today, but when the group began to exhibit such work the paintings deeply appalled Academy officials and the viewing public. Looking at these paintings today, what we see are quaintly historic images dripping with romanticism — but what viewers saw a century ago was something rather different. To them, the colors were of a shocking and vulgar brightness, rather like hanging Peter Max posters on the gallery walls. (The colors have since faded with age; we can only imagine their impact.) Furthermore, the Brotherhood ignored the prescribed list of respectable Academic subjects; instead, they painted images drawn from Celtic legends and English folk lore; from Romantic poets like Shelley and Keats and modern writers like Tennyson–or else they treated traditional subjects in shockingly untraditional ways. Millais' luminous painting of Christ's childhood, for instance, horrified Victorian viewers because it placed a barefoot Christ-child in a common carpenter's workshop.

The following review from the *London Times* was typical of the notice they received: "We cannot censor at present as amply or as strongly as we desire to do that strange disorder of the mind or eyes that continues to rage with unabated absurdity among a class of juvenile artists who style themselves the PRB. These young artists have unfortunately become notorious by addicting themselves to an antiquated style and an affected simplicity in painting which is to genuine art what the medieval ballads and designs in *Punch* are to Chaucer." Although taken aback by the fury of these attacks, the Brotherhood then received a stroke of luck. The influential critic John Ruskin, who admired the young painters' fidelity to nature, wrote to the *Times* in their defense, concluding that "with all their faults, their pictures are since Turner's death the best, the incomparably best, on the walls of the Royal Academy." Now the tides began to turn. With John Ruskin's invaluable (and often meddlesome) patronage, the Pre-Raphaelite style of painting proceeded to change Victorian ideas about art and to buck the old establishment. Over time, these artists grew famous, wealthy, and *became* the art establishment

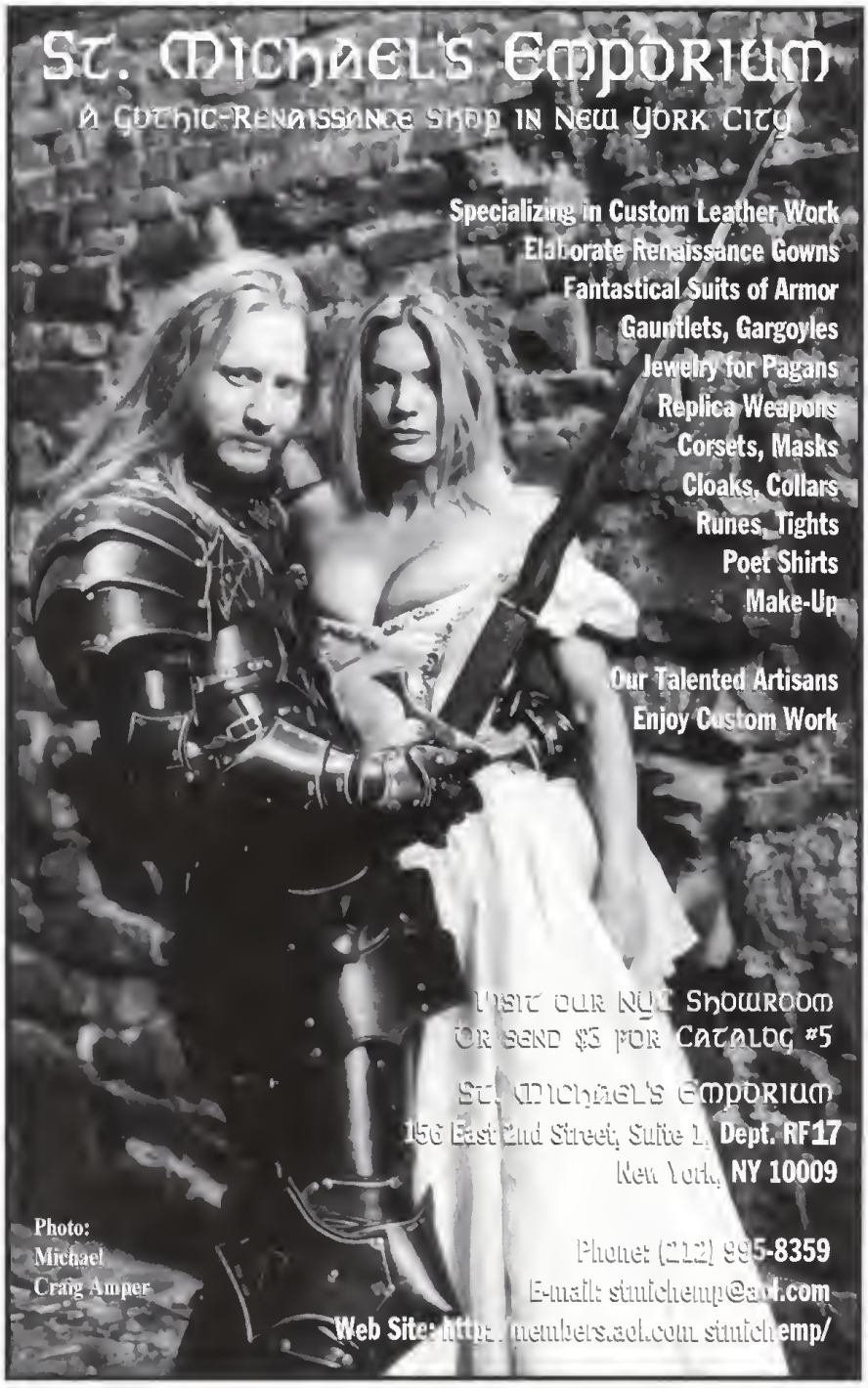
against which the next generation of students (the Modernists) would rebel.

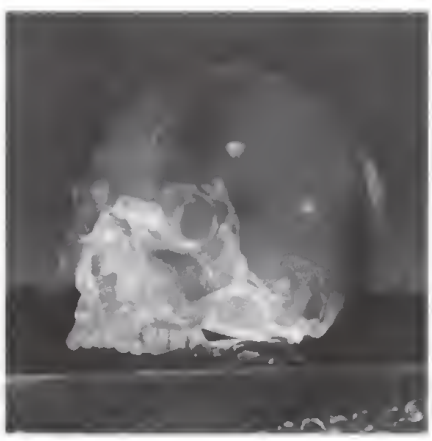
Although the name "Pre-Raphaelite" is now applied to a broad spectrum of artists, the original Brotherhood itself lasted only a few years before its querulous members went their separate ways. Johnny Millais, the most accomplished painter of the group, became a highly fashionable society artist; the frothy, sentimental canvases of his later years were widely viewed as a betrayal of the cause–but earned him the money needed to support the enormous number of children he had after running away with Ruskin's wife in a widely publicized scandal. "Holy" Hunt became obsessed with Palestine, traveling to the Holy Lands to paint his religious subjects from life. In this he stayed true to the PRB ideals, painting long hours in the hot desert sun–and carrying a pistol in his belt (he claimed) to discourage the local bandits. Gabriel Rossetti's work largely abandoned the early PRB ideals: his palette grew darker, his compositions more formal, and he rarely painted out-of-doors as he focused, almost exclusively, on feminine face and form. These lush allegorical portraits scandalized, yet mesmerized, the Victorian public. Indeed, so popular were Rossetti's ladies, with their wistful gazes and cascades of crinkly hair, that this is the image most of us now associate with Pre-Raphaelitism–rather than the *plein air* paintings of the original Brotherhood.

Rossetti was an eccentric, passionate man with great personal charisma, and he drew around him an extraordinary circle of artists, poets and acolytes whom he fired with Romantic ideals. The big brick riverside house he rented in London's Chelsea neighborhood was shared with the poet Algernon Swinburne, the novelist George Meredith, Rossetti's patient brother Michael (who often ended up paying all the bills), and a menagerie of pets including peacocks, marmots, deer, armadillos, hedgehogs, a vicious kangaroo, and some rather disgruntled wombats. This was the London of Oscar Wilde's day, when Whistler, or Browning, or shy Charles Dodgson (a k a Lewis Carroll) might drop in for tea and the latest gossip, and Thomas Carlyle's rather shabby figure could be seen strolling along the Thames. In one famous story, the inspiration for the dormouse in the teapot in *Alice in Wonderland* is said to have come from a pet rodent fast asleep in Rossetti's soup tureen; in other stories, visitors to the house related how Swinburne would go into fits, throwing off his clothes and dancing naked while reciting his poetry.

This was a lavishly Bohemian household, at odds with our usual tight-laced, repressive image of the Victorians. It is true that respectable women–like Rossetti's sister, the poet Christina Rossetti–would not have been allowed to frequent the house or take part in the creative camaraderie; but these rules did not pertain to working class girls, considered

Continued on page 28





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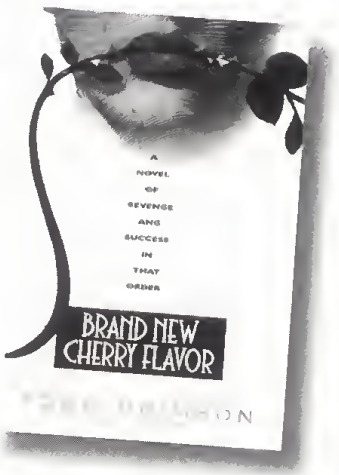
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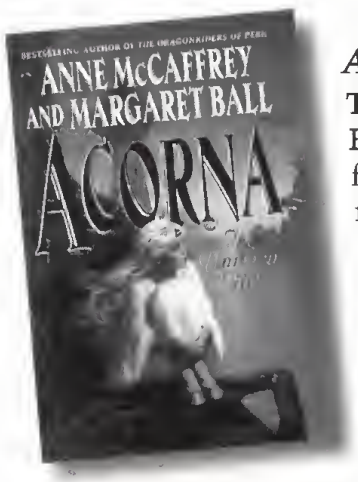
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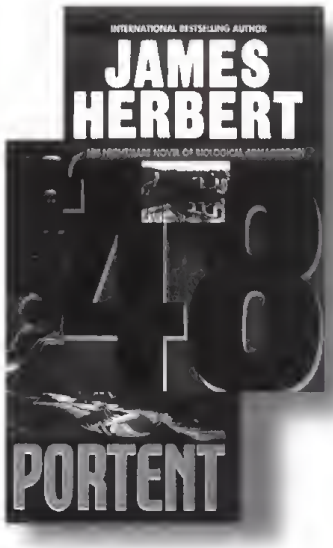
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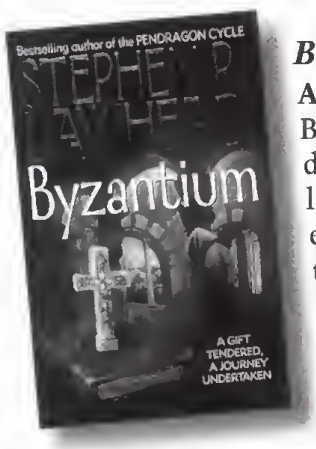
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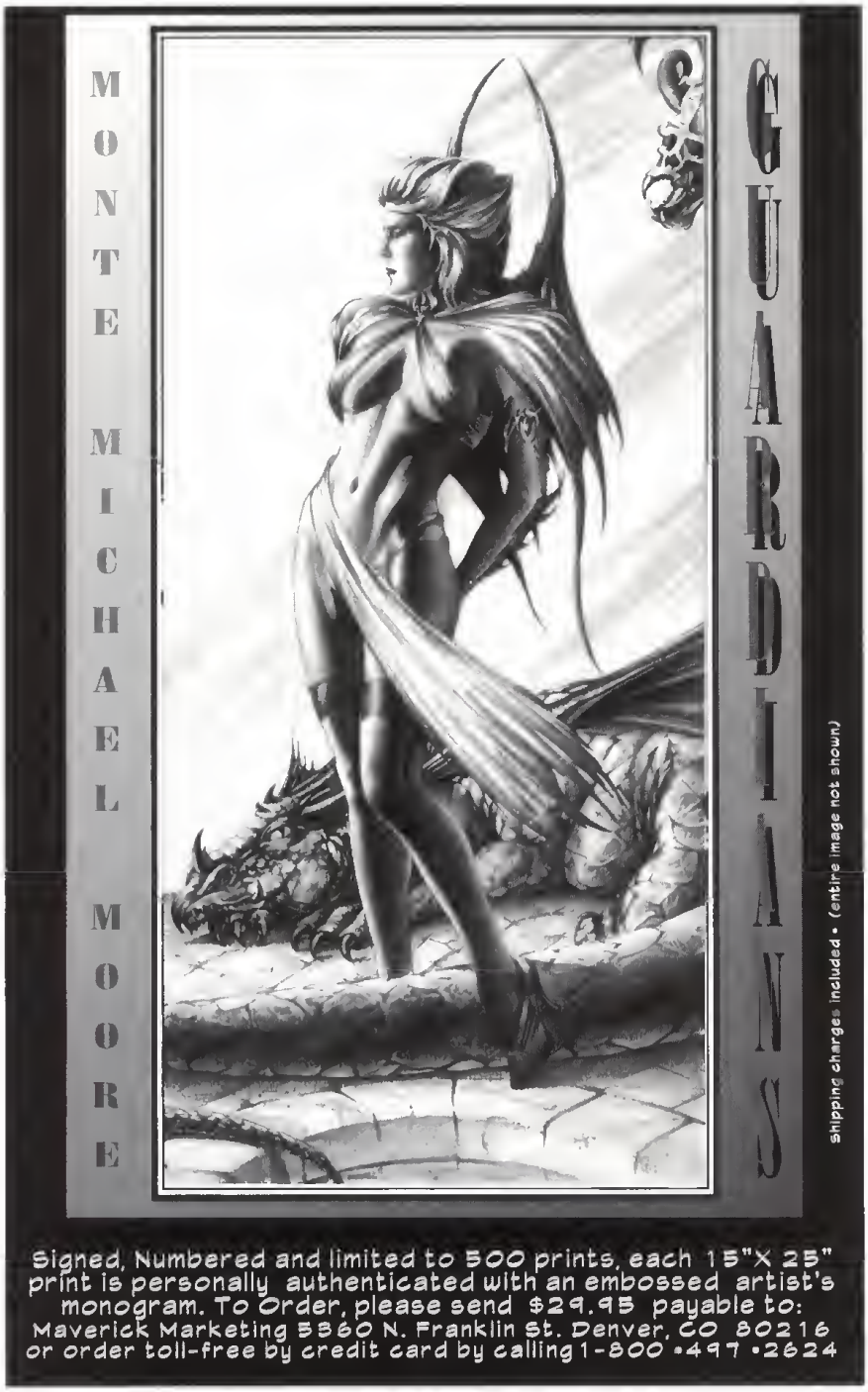
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little better than whores anyway — particularly if they modeled for painters, whether they kept on their clothes or not. One of these models was Elizabeth Siddal, a cutler's daughter from the wrong side of the river with artistic ambitions of her own. "Lizzie," as she was known, is the tall woman with long straight golden hair who sits, sleeps, dreams and combs her locks in so many of Rossetti's early drawings; she was his Muse, companion, painting partner...and eventually his wife, much to the horror of Rossetti's middle-class family. Growing up poor and female, Lizzie would have had no access to artistic training–yet she blossomed in Bohemian company, producing Romantic drawings and paintings that won Ruskin's praise and patronage. To Rossetti's credit, at a time when women's art was severely marginalized he had genuine faith in Lizzie's work and took great pains to promote it. Yet she died before her work matured, and little of it survives today. Always physically frail, depressive, and never certain of Rossetti's constancy, she died of an overdose of laudanum (an opium tincture) after the stillborn birth of their child. Officially listed as an "accidental death," rumors of suicide were spread — and to this day no one really knows. Distraught with grief, Rossetti buried his unpublished poems in his wife's coffin, wrapped up in her long gold hair. Years later, in an incident now famous in literary history, he reconsidered this romantic gesture and dug the coffin back up, retrieving the poems and publishing them. Legend has it that Lizzie's famous hair was just as bright as always.

By this time, Rossetti had a new Muse — Jane Morris, another working class girl, and the wife of one of his closest friends. "Topsy" Morris and "Ned" Jones had been students together at Oxford; Rossetti was older, already famous, and the younger men idolized his work. They wrote him a letter and were invited to come and visit him in his London digs. William Morris, rather a bearish young man, was blessed with an inherited income and a prodigious amount of energy. Unlike Ned, Morris was never much of an oil painter, but there was very little else the man couldn't do. Turning his talents to decorative arts, he sought to create a world around them as romantic as any Pre-Raphaelite painting, filling their houses with medieval-looking furniture (hand painted by Ned and Rossetti), designing tapestries, textiles, ceramics, metalwork, silverwork, stained glass and anything else that caught his fancy. He was the force behind *Morris and Co.*, a firm dedicated to making and marketing objects of Pre-Raphaelite design. It was Morris's dream to thus bring art into the daily life of the common man; it was his belief that filling a man's soul with beauty was as important as filling his belly with food. Appalled by the cheap ugliness produced by the new methods of mass produc-

tion, Morris championed the beauty of handcraft methods based on medieval craft societies. So strong was this vision that Morris is still a force in British design over one hundred years later: his furniture is still in use (particularly the famous "Morris chair"), his wallpaper designs are still found in houses all over England and America; his unique wool dye recipes are still followed; his beautiful type designs are classics; the handprinted books of his Kelmscott Press sit in museum collections around the world. In addition, Morris was one of the fathers of modern British socialism; and many fine old English houses still exist thanks to the Society for the Preservation of Antique Buildings that Morris founded. This tireless man also wrote popular books of poetry and prose–including translations of old Icelandic sagas, and magical tales such as *Well at the World's End* (considered by some literary historians to be the first modern fantasy novel.)

Morris' boundless creative energy disguised a tragic private life; his wife, Jane, and Rossetti had fallen passionately in love. Although famous for his temper, in this regard he seems to have shown an extraordinary patience. He rented Kelmscott Manor in Oxfordshire along with Rossetti; thus the lovers were able to be together without actually breaking up Jane's marriage. It was about this time that he wrote his poem cycle *The Defense of Guenevere* — the only clue we have of Morris's feelings about this painful period of his life. His patience paid off some years later when two tragedies drew the couple back together: one, their daughter was diagnosed with epilepsy (untreatable and devastating); and Rossetti's mental health (always a bit unstable) began to collapse. Convinced he was stalked by enemies, and haunted by his dead wife's ghost, Rossetti retreated to his Chelsea house where he took great quantities of laudanum and wrote plaintive letters to Jane. His other mistress, Fanny Cornforth, looked after him there until the end of his life. A former model and prostitute, Fanny was considered so vulgar by the Rossetti circle that she was not invited to his funeral, although she was probably the steadiest, truest friend the painter had. With Rossetti's departure, Kelmscott Manor became a true home for Morris, Jane and their two children; Jane eventually bought the house after Morris' death. This beautiful stone manor house in the gentle hills of Oxfordshire has since been restored and is open to the public during the summer months. In Kelmscott churchyard, Morris and Jane are buried in a single, simple grave.

Topsy and Ned remained fast friends from their Oxford days to the end of their lives. Ned became Sir Edward Burne-Jones, a celebrated Pre-Raphaelite painter of mystical, dream-like imagery. It was Burne-Jones's distinctive work that largely inspired the next generation of Pre-Raphaelites — painters such as J.W. Waterhouse, Evelyn de Morgan,

Continued on page 75



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The Chapter of the Hawk of Gold

BY NOREEN DOYLE
Illustration by Janet Aulisio

TWO HUNDRED YEARS HAVE PEELED PAINT, BROKEN shingles, and cracked the granite step of the shed housing the Healy Tompkins Museum. The beams are sound, the floor solid, and most of the glass original. Everything in the museum is in this same state: whole inside, broken only outside.

Periodically the Ladies of the Pithom Historical Society make these outsides someone's business. Jenny Alcock knew it would happen to her someday. Her mother doesn't attend the Historical Society; her father drives for an out-of-town vending company owned by an old French family. Who else at Pithom Independent High School is better suited for the honor?



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even her own mother insists. It will keep Jenny out of trouble.

Askew on the wall hang amber-colored panoramics of uniformed men, with names scrawled in white ink. In one cabinet, a sailor's valentine beds down beside a carved lacquer cup stand from China. A thin, balding rug from Ghiordes carpets the floor in faded Turkish red and yellow. A Spanish silver candlestick, supplied with a beeswax candle, occupies a George I burled walnut side table (so the labels say). The silver is tarnished, and alternating seasons of damp summer heat and dry winter cold have split the walnut veneer.

Healy Tompkins was paper–mill baron and traveler. He went often to Egypt on business and made pilgrimages to most of the Christian shrines in Jerusalem, of which Jenny finds old photographs in a steamer trunk. One cabinet is devoted to such things as "Sliver of the True Cross" or "Saint Peter's Tympanum." But of all Healy Tompkins' Egyptian travels, the Pithom Historical Society has only one souvenir.

The label, pounded out on an Underwood that cut out all the o's, reads: *Hawk Mummy. Late Period. Purchased Cairo, 1889.*

Covered in dust as thick as gray felt, it feels light, like the paper mâche parrot she made in seventh grade. Light as a bird.

A wooden mask, once gold-leafed but now mostly bare, encases the head. Jenny pities it, wings all linen-bound, and she always dusts it twice each week.

As the ceiling fan vibrates the overhead light, the hawk winks its black glass eyes.

The Ladies of the Pithom Historical Society usually arrive at four. Someone from the Maine State Museum will be visiting, they say, and run a white glove across the glass display cases, put a cotton wad on a yardstick and thrust it down behind shelves. This won't be like your mother's trailer, they say. It's to be cleaned and polished, the panoramics of Union soldiers will hang so evenly that Mrs. Egars will be able to balance a pea on top. The same grade of paper shall be used for each label, all t's crossed, i's dotted, and p's and q's properly tidy, that's how it's to be you little snot.

One of these inspections dislodges a sheet of brown paper behind the mummy.

Which leaps from its shelf.

Mrs. Egars jumps two feet straight. Madame President Wallace shrieks and throws herself to the floor but the hawk follows. It is five minutes before everyone has calmed enough to see that Mrs. Egars knocked it over with the yardstick.

For all its hard fall, the hawk mummy's glass eyes stare as brightly as ever, looking proud of its first flight in two thousand years.

The Ladies of the Pithom Historical Society leave early that day.

The paper, written by Healy Tompkins, is headed: *Book of the Dead, Chapter LXXVII. Transforming to Hawk of Gold. Am I,* it goes, *rise I from secret place like hawk of gold coming from egg his. Fly I like hawk of cubits seven upon back his. Be glorious I.*

The English is fractured, as if he'd written drunk (wouldn't that shock the Ladies of the Pithom Historical Society!), but the writing is businesslike. The hieroglyphs marching between the lines of English are neat and tidy and precisely drawn.

She likes it. More than two thousand years ago, some ancient Egyptian had felt exactly the way she felt. Unlike her mother, unlike her father, someday Jenny Alcock was going to leave (this town, with it's crackling veneer) and make something of herself.

Having dusted the hawk again, she turns to the panoramics. She sees typically Egars' noses, the broad hands of MacKee's. In all these years they have not changed. Even the new Wallaces look like the old Wallaces. But there are no Tompkinses. Not any more.

On an old Underwood she types new labels, hitting the o gently, so as not to cut out the letters. She tends to the photographs first, then to the sailor's valentine. Lastly she taps out a new label for Hawk Mummy. Late Period. Purchased Cairo, 1889.

But what, then, about the paper written out by Healy Tompkins? The poem should be written better, and she will, and play a trick on the Ladies of the Pithom Historical Society.

With pen and ink and brown paper from Healy Tompkins's writing desk, she meticulously practices his handwriting. For an entire week, 20 minutes each day, she practices the long loops of his g's, the firm dots of his i's, the miserly cross of his t's. Satisfied at last by her progress, she buries the papers in Mr. Mackee's pile of leaves, knowing that they will be ashes before noon.

Today she will rewrite Healy Tompkins' poem.

"A Translation, in His Own Hand," a label will say. "Found by Mrs. Charles Egars."

The Ladies of the Pithom Historical Society will look foolish when someone from the State Museum notices that the ink is fresh. Jenny's mother will give her a beating for making trouble, but Jenny doesn't care. As soon as she is finished, she will fly away from Pithom and this museum and her parents' trailer and everything. She is ready. Knapsack, bus ticket to Portland, Triple-A road map, and an extra pair of sneakers wait by the door.

The hawk mummy winks at her with black glass eyes, although by now it is late October and the ceiling fan isn't on and the light hangs perfectly still.

It is not much of a poem, but she likes it anyway. Shabby outside, its strength lies within its words.

She writes: *I AM! May I rise from this tomb like a hawk of gold coming forth from his egg, may I fly gloriously on wings seven cubits wide!*

The pen shoots across the shed as a spasm tears through her wrist. The inkwell tips and brown-black ink streams off the desk onto the Ghiordes rug, which drinks it in.

It is nearly four o'clock.

Fear knots her stomach and arms and legs which cramp with terror because soon the Ladies will be here, but no, it is something deeper than fear. It is something that knots up her bones and her skin and her arteries and reweaves them from the inside. Legs shorten and twist, fingers lengthen, toes extend, a feather sprouts from every tenth pore.

She has wings to spread. They are fast against her side, but she has wings and will fly. Far below will Pithom be, she will come forth from this tomb. Away from the Ladies of the Pithom Historical Society and away from her mother, Jenny Alcock will become glorious.

The shed is too small for her wings; they remain fast. The spell says seven cubits, which Jenny suddenly realizes must be very large. How big is a cubit? Outside there will be room for seven cubits, and more. Jenny takes a step forward toward the window and the wide world beyond. And cannot.

She is linen-bound.

To one side of her sits a fragment of wood and above it a label: *Sliver of the True Cross. At her feet is another: Hawk Mummy. Late Period. Purchased Cairo, 1889.*

Jenny finds herself stared upon by herself. But this other girl who has Jenny's face and Jenny's shoes and Jenny's hair has eyes that are too shiny, too black, like polished glass.

This glass-eyed thing with Jenny's face speaks in a language thick and throaty with age. Jenny cannot understand it, but she recognizes the words. Hieroglyphs have sound in them, and this is that sound.

The thing with Jenny's face throws open a window with bull's-eye panes. Wind flashes through the shed, tearing gently-typed labels from their pins, shattering cabinet doors, snowing dust over shelves and tumbling precious, ancient relics: the tympanum of Saint Peter, the sailor's valentine, the hawk mummy.

As Jenny falls she shrieks, or would shriek, if her beak were not bound up like her wings.

The thing with Jenny's face replaces hawk-mummy Jenny carefully upon the shelf, dusts the linen wrappings and the wooden mask, and winks.

And flies out the window on wings seven cubits wide. ❧

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The poem should be no more than 20 lines, and the poet's name and address must appear on the top of the page. "All poets who enter will receive a response concerning their artistry, usually within seven weeks," indicated Mr. Ely.

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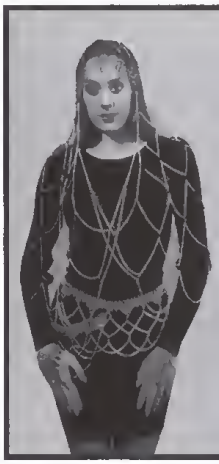
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Topical stories can often date, and fall out of the news even before publication. Sadly, this one never will.

ONCE THERE HAD BEEN SIRENS, screaming in the night, sending people rat-scurrying through the streets, running as if running would help. Or else hiding under tables, under beds, as if somehow the mortar shell would not find them there and, instead, pass on to some other house where people were less diligent. *Ah, look,* the mortar would say, *I can see a toe,* and that would be that.

These days the explosions are their own announcement, waking Miska in the night with a spray of plaster from what's left of the ceiling. Sometimes she can see the light of a fire burning through the window, more often now that the firemen have gone, chased away by the snipers. Most nights she simply rolls over and goes back to sleep, but often it pulls her to the window and she watches as the red tracer bullets light up the sky.

The ghosts are out tonight, dancing under the light of the burning city. Soon, they seem to say, soon the city will be ours and ours alone, as the shells fall and the great grey buildings that have stood for centuries shatter into broken stone. But Miska is not fooled; Sarajevo has seen war before and will see war again, and again after that. The ghosts of old wars have always been here.

BALKAN SIEGE

BY RUSSELL WILLIAM ASPLUND

Illustration by David Beck

MISKA IS THE ONLY ONE TO RISE, SOAKED WITH THE DEAD MAN'S BLOOD. SOMEONE IS SCREAMING; SHE LOOKS AROUND TO SEE THE SCHOOLBOY, CLUTCHING HIS CHEST AS HIS LIFE RUNS OUT BETWEEN HIS FINGERS.

She opens the window and leans out for a better look. The city smells of smoke and human waste, worse now that summer is coming on again. Human plumbing is more trustworthy than that which carries water to the city, and no one has bothered to gather trash for months. Why, when so much of the city is being turned to rubbish each day?

The onion-domed tower of a mosque is burning nearby, the latest victim of the siege. In its light the ghosts have gathered, ice-rimmed, translucent figures that she has come to recognize slowly throughout the siege. *Mother*, she had asked back when there had been a mother to ask, *who are the white men?*

An innocent question then, an innocent time; a lifetime away now. Two lifetimes, actually, her mother's and her father's, and how she had survived the blast was a miracle for which she was not grateful. Her mother couldn't see them, but Miska had described them to her, her mother smiling as if it were a game. The armored men were Greeks, or maybe Illyrians, with their plumed hats and wide swords. The rifle carriers, shades of World Wars distinguishable only by the cut of their clothes, the sleek lines of their guns. A fine game of history, now that the schools were closed.

They fight out on the streets, with swords or guns or hands, it doesn't matter. Pantalooned Turks and camouflaged doughboys, legionaries and nationalists, caught in a bloodless ballet of death. There are more of them each time she looks, it seems. Far away another bomb hits the city, its explosion rolling in like distant thunder. She shuts the window and crawls into her bed, pulling the blankets close despite the heat.

By morning the mosque is reduced to a barely discernable column of smoke, but at least the fire has not spread. Miska runs along the sunlit streets, staying close to buildings, eyeing the windows for stray movement. Others are also running, gripping bags to their chests; a few walk down the middle of the sidewalk in a show of bravado. Miska has seen too many fall, shattered by an unseen sniper, to risk such a display.

She arrives to find a line, but no truck. It is Thursday and there should be a truck, but the street is empty. Twenty or thirty Sarajevans drift aimlessly, greying clothes tinged with soot and ash. They make a fine target there in the street, if anyone is bothering to watch. No need to even aim, just start firing, *pop pop pop*. Watch them scatter.

But no one is watching, not today.

She finds blind Draza sitting in the shadow of a doorway, his dead, slug-white eyes closed as if in sleep, but Draza is listening, always listening. He smiles when he hears her footsteps, sits as straight as his ancient back will let him. "Ah, Little Miska, how are you this morning?"

"I'm hungry," she says, sitting on the steps beside him, "where is the goddamned truck?"

Her mother would be shocked by her language, but her mother can no longer be shocked by anything less than a mortar strike at the graveyard. And on a morning like this, sun blasting down with promised heat and the silent sky holding the promise of shells to come, it seems indeed that God has damned them all to their own very Balkan hell. Perhaps that is why she sees ghosts.

"No truck today," Draza says. "The shelling is too bad. The UN is pulling out again."

"Cowards." Miska curses them without heat. The last time it had been worse; it had been the middle of winter. They had cooked Dusan's dog one night, in a fire made of furniture from her mother's office. The whole apartment complex, those still alive, came to share the feast. Already her mind was working forward, thinking of places where food and water could still be found, toting up the price.

"Not cowards, just practical. There is nothing left here worth having, why should they fight?" Draza's eyes are closed again, and Miska wonders what he's listening to, wonders how this blind man has survived, when her sighted parents could not save themselves.

"The ghosts were out again last night." Blind Draza nods sleepily. Perhaps this time he is not faking it, but then his voice comes.

"Tell me."

She tells him about the figures she has seen, bone-white, drifting in the streets. Draza knows the ghosts are not a game; he says he can hear them at night, like the snap of sails in the wind, feel their passage like a cold draft of air. She tells him their dress, their weapons, and Draza identifies the players.

"Abd al-Hamid's men," he says about the Turks, "even their empire is no more than a ghost."

He is more interested in the recent dead. He lost his eyes in World War II, lost friends to the fighting he misses more than sight. But Miska can never remember details, they are all just soldiers to her, arm and legs to carry guns.

He listens anyway, as the sun rises higher and the crowd slowly drifts away, dazed and aimless. Miska's hunger is a hard knot in her belly, weighing down her talk until it fades to nothing. "I will see you tomorrow, Draza."

"I won't see you." It is an old joke, almost a mantra. Draza was always there, would always be there, like the city itself, battle-worn and wounded, but still standing. Or in Draza's case, sitting, drifting off to sleep for real now. Miska leaves him and dodges into the street.

The shattered buildings loom around her like an enchanted forest, stripped of their leaves of stone and glass; the rusting iron branches of the trees twist and curl above her. A car drives by, one window a shattering of fine lines, the driver hunching down, trying to make himself small. The engine sounds like a homing beacon, and she can still hear it long after the car has passed, leaving only the smell of petrol.

Silence and darkness, that is all that will save her — she craves it like a drug, but she has to eat. She knows where the French soldiers billet; it is a long walk, but she could make it, beg some food from the guilty soldiers who do no more than watch. Perhaps that is where she will go.

"Hey, Miska." She jumps at the sound of her name. There are so few who know it now, since her family has died. If not for blind Draza, she thought perhaps no one would know it now. Sometimes at night she dreams that the world has forgotten her, that she drifts through crowded peacetime streets, unable to touch or to make herself heard. It is a pleasant dream.

She looks around at the dark-haired boy who has stepped out of the darkness of a doorway. He is shabby and ill-dressed, as are they all, but she has a flash of recognition. He was in her school, those two lifetimes ago, maybe even a friend; certainly an acquaintance.

"Hello," she says tentatively, unsure if she should smile. His name, she struggles to remember his name. His name would tell her what she needs to know; is he Muslim, Christian, Serb, Croat… His name would tell her where to file him in this oh-so-complicated game in which they are trapped.

"I'm glad to see you alive." He looks glad, stepping forward tentatively. His face is round and non-descript, dark eyes and hair hanging down to get in his face. He brushes it back. "Where are you going?"

"The truck didn't come," Miska says. "Draza says there was shelling."

He takes another step forward. His eyes will not stay still, glancing up at the buildings, at the burned-out tank across the street, at the spot in the sidewalk where several blades of grass and some blue flowers are pushing up out of the cracks. "I hear they are leaving for good this time." His eyes come back to rest on her face. "That's what I hear."

"I need to find food." Suddenly he seems too close, the sound of his breathing more threatening than bombs. He reaches out to touch her arm.

"I know where there is food. Come with me, there are so few people left I know." She looks back at him, his dark eyes earnest, pleading. The darkness makes her feel safe. "Please."

She can smell him now, a pungent odor of sweat and fear that clouds around him almost visibly. A fine dew of perspiration clings to the thin whiskers that are just forming along his upper lip. He is breathing hard, on the edge of panic. Miska nods and he seems to relax.

"Come on," he says, and Miska can almost picture the schoolboy he had once been, walking down the hall, hurrying and laughing, bumping the smaller children aside. She lets herself be led back down the street, away from the French soldiers.

"Where are we going?" He still has not let go of her, and his fingers are beginning to burn where they grip her wrist.

"To get food." He knows enough to stay close to the buildings, hugging the shadows that fall sharp-edged and dark in the bright sun. Those windows that are left burn with golden light. The street is full of furtive traffic, scampering along, eager to get indoors.

For a while she is content to follow; it is a luxury being led. Since her parents died she has had only herself to rely on, her own decisions. Should she let herself be taken to an orphanage? Did she trust the soldiers who brought food? It's nice to let someone else take control, decide on the turnings, how long to pause, when to run and when it is safe to walk. She looks around the city and tries to remember what it looked like before.

They are deep into the city when she sees the ghost. She has not seen them often during the day, only once or twice as she rushed past scenes of death and confusion. When she catches the frost-white glimpse of a figure behind a window, she freezes.

The boy doesn't notice that she has stopped and tugs her arm painfully before turning to look at her. "Come, we're almost there, just around the corner."

Miska can no longer see the ghost. They are in an older part of the city; the buildings here huddle closer together, small grey buildings that once housed factories and repair shops. A small, plastic sign marks the entrance to a bar, now boarded up. She tries to pull her hand away, turning her head to look back over her shoulder. She sees what might be a flash of sunlight here, the billow of a white sheet there.

"Come on." His voice is still wheedling, almost cloying, but there is an edge to it now. She turns in time to see the men come around the corner.

"That's far enough." The boy drops her hand and turns to face the men. There are three of them — large, rough men in dark clothing. The closest wears a pair of American sunglasses that hide his eyes. He smiles at the children; his thin, almost skull-like face does not look hungry. It is not the war; he has always looked like this, always been death's friend and confidant.

Those behind him are carrying ropes and a sack. Miska grabs the boy by the shoulder and turns to run, but he does not come. She turns, thinking he might be scared, but her shouted warning dies on her lips. The thin man has his arm around the boy.

"You've done well," the thin man says. The boy shrugs, his gaze firmly fastened on the ground. The thin man looks at Miska, and there is a hunger in his face now that makes Miska's blood freeze. "You were right, she's a pretty one; she'll make a fine — "

There is a *crack* above the thin man's head, and a shattering of glass falling to the street. He does not even have time to look up before the next bullet catches him, spinning him around, red blood arching from his neck like water from a medieval fountain. More shots follow, kicking up dust and rocks from the street.

They try to scatter, each running in a different direction. The thin man is not dead; he clutches his throat and runs right at Miska, his eyes as sightless as blind Draza's, seeing only the certainty of death. Miska tries to move out of the way, but he is on her and they fall in a tangle of blood and limbs.

Miska is the only one to rise, her hair soaked with the dead man's blood. Someone is screaming; she looks around to see the schoolboy, clutching his chest as his life runs out between his fingers. A bullet raises sparks nearby, and Miska turns to run.

The ghosts run with her, she can see them now, all around her, thick as fog in winter. Translucent faces mirror her panic, running blindly; in each face she can see the moment when they knew their own death, its cold inevitability. She runs, crouching low, waiting for a bullet to take her.

She feels the rumbling more than hears it and knows that more shelling has begun. Her legs are weak and shaking, her hunger weighing her down like a stone. Perhaps she is dead already, running with the ghosts from war to war, eternally fleeing from a fate that is already sealed.

She turns a corner in time to see a car erupt in flames, close enough that she feels the blast, is deafened by its roar. Ghosts swirl in its wake, blown like leaves in the wind, like ash from a fire, pale, two dimensional soldiers rising toward the heavens. The smell of burning metal is strong and sharp.

The blast is followed by another, further up the street, which catches a bank in its upper stories. Miska runs across the street as bricks and glass shower the pavement.

She can hear the crackling of gunfire; fast, repeating automatic rifle fire, harsh commands shouted over the sounds of the fighting. The Serbs are making a move on the city, sensing its weakness. Miska's feet have been carrying her toward home, but at the sound of the gunfire she turns, runs for the cover of a doorway.

Another explosion. The ground shifts beneath her feet, and the window beside her shatters into a thousand glittering crystals that cut her skin, bite at her arms. She covers her face as best she can, keeps running. The ghosts float past her, racing ahead, an endless stream of the Balkan dead. She struggles to keep up, racing down the street lost in a fog of ghosts, unable to see where she is running. They pass around her, through her, carrying her along streets lined by buildings of stone and brick and glass, buildings accreted over the centuries, ancient cathedrals and modern highrises, Olympic venues long since gone to ruin, like Roman coliseums, crumbling under the weight of history.

Someone reaches out and grabs her as she passes. The hand is white and bony, and she screams, striking out. The arms pull her in gently, a soothing voice cutting across her panic. "Hey now, even a blind man knows not to run toward the fighting. Calm down; think. You have to think to stay alive."

"The ghosts," she says, her voice shuddering. Blood and sweat run stinging into her eyes, and she tries to wipe it away, but her hands are bloody, too.

Blind Draza holds her tightly. "The ghosts are always here, have always been here. Ghosts can't kill you, only the present can."

Draza is white and thin as a ghost, but his arms are warm and real. He pulls her deeper into the doorway. The ghosts are still there, flitting around like moths drawn to a flame, the great horde moving towards the fighting, not away, some marching, some running,

AND ON A MORNING LIKE THIS, SUN BLASTING DOWN WITH PROMISED HEAT AND THE SILENT SKY HOLDING THE PROMISE OF SHELLS TO COME, IT SEEMS INDEED THAT GOD HAS DAMNED THEM ALL TO THEIR OWN VERY BALKAN HELL.

others not bothering with motion at all, just drifting — ashen, hollow-eyed witnesses of this latest violence.

"They're beautiful, Draza. Like a river, like the Miljacka in winter, they are the only beautiful thing left in this city."

"Nonsense. You're here, aren't you?" She can hear explosions, men screaming in pain and anger, and here is Draza, smiling, comforting. She looks down at herself, covered with blood, dingy with smoke, shivering, half-starved.

"You can't even see me."

He puts his hands on her face, his touch gentle, forcing her to look him in the face, at his milky, dead eyes. "I can see them, out there. For a while, when my eyes were taken, they were all I could see. You are warm and kind and alive, most of all alive. They are merely the echoes of old wars, conflicts best left forgotten. Their beauty is hollow, colder than any winter river. We have all lived in their dead grip far too long."

There are tears now at the corners of his eyes; she did not know those eyes were capable of tears. The flow of ghosts is slowing now as the battle moves nearer. She tries the door behind them, but it is locked. "We have to leave."

Draza nods, and cocks his head, listening. "The Serbs are still three blocks west; I hear government forces to the north."

Miska takes his hand and sticks her head cautiously out of the doorway. The afternoon sun is partially blocked by the haze of acrid smoke that hangs over the city. Several cars burn along the street, their occupants having either fled or died.

They run now, together, moving upstream this time against the tide of ghosts. Now, with Draza beside her, they seem less real, tricks of smoke and light. They must stop often; Draza is breathing hard and coughing in great ragged fits, spitting out blood and phlegm. It is during one of these pauses that Miska realizes the ghosts are moving with them once again.

She looks around wildly — they are surrounded on all sides. She listens, but the sound of fighting is distant now, and yet the ghosts are gathering here, thickening even as she watches. Draza is bent over, ancient lungs trying to clear themselves. He cocks his head, listening, and suddenly Miska knows what the ghosts mean.

"Get down," she yells, pulling Draza's arm, pulling him off balance, falling to the ground even as the rocket shell lands above them, shatters the upper stories of the building with a flash of fire.

They are surrounded by dust and smoke, the ground buckling like a wounded animal, throwing them off their feet, shaking them as debris falls around them. The rocket is followed by a second, then a third. Miska's ears are ringing from the blasts, as dead as Draza's eyes. It takes several minutes for the smoke to clear enough to see, before she can rise and look for Draza.

The fighting is moving closer, despite the shelling. She finds Draza half-buried under shattered concrete. A pool of crimson, tinged grey with dust, is growing around his head. She thinks he cannot have survived, but somehow, miraculously, he is still moving, one hand feebly pushing at the large concrete block that covers his legs.

Miska rushes to his side, lifts his head into her lap. His already pale face is whitened further with the dust; dark tracks of blood trace a map across the whiteness. One piece of scalp is pulled away from his skull, dangling wetly. Miska tries to think of something to say, some comfort to give, but Draza does not need comfort. His face is serene, his dead eyes move as if watching something no one else can see.

A stray beam of sunlight breaks through the smoke, lighting his face, turning his white hair into a blazing glory around his face. "Miska," he says, patting her leg. "Miska ... "

His voice is soft, but the words are strong and clear. She leans close, feels the soft fall of his breath on her cheek, smells the sweet decay of his breath. The blood is soaking through the fabric of her slacks, soaking into her socks and shoes. Draza's face is alive, focused, alight with some fire of revelation. "Miska, you must promise me — "

A shot rings out, loud and close, catching Miska in the left forearm, ripping through the soft tissue. The bullet passes through Draza's head, a splattering of blood and bone and pale grey brain tissue like a Rorshach test across the sidewalk. There is not even time for a last breath — suddenly Draza is not there, only ruined flesh, shattered and unrecognizable.

She throws the body off her lap with a scream, moving crabwise across the sidewalk. Her arm is bleeding profusely, but the pain is a dull, distant thing; something else is rising in her, bringing her to her feet. She searches the window, craning her neck. Another bullet strikes sparks near her feet; she sees the muzzle flash from a darkened window above her and runs toward it.

She expects to die as she rushes forward, wonders what it will feel like when the bullet takes her, but it doesn't come. She screams again, but in anger this time, cursing the sniper, shouting threats. The door to the building is locked, but a shattered storefront gains her entrance. She can sense the ghosts with her, trailing like a wake behind her as she runs, drawn along by her anger.

The stairs pass like a blur, floor after floor, the steps uneven, tilted drunkenly but still serviceable. She counts to five, then is off the stairs, kicking open doors along the windowed side of the building. Empty offices with shattered windows, grey metal filing cabinets and desks still covered with papers, the work still waiting like a faithful dog for its master to return.

She finds the sniper in the fourth office she tries. The door bangs open and there he is, turning slowly as she dives toward him. The ghosts fill the room like smoke behind her as she lands, kicking, scratching, swearing. He cannot bring his gun around in such close quarters. She grabs it away, twisting it out of his hands, then falling back, gun pointed at his chest.

She sees the blood then for the first time, running from a wound above his left eye. There is more she sees; his face is cut, bleeding like hers from a thousand tiny wounds. She looks at the window, at the shattering of glass beneath it, then back at the boy. One large piece of glass protrudes from his leg, blood darkening the brown uniform around it.

The explosion. It had caught him off guard as well, up here in his position above the city, blowing out the window he leaned against. He is young, not much older than she, but, as she has seen today, violence and betrayal are ageless. She brings the gun to her shoulder, aims down its barrel.

The sound of fighting drifts up from below, hollow and distant.

Continued on Page 77

In the world of publishing there are authors —
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When you bury enough secrets, odds are good that sooner or later, one of them will bloom into revenge.

THE SPIRAL GARDEN

THE CHANCELLOR ENTERED THE AUDIENCE ROOM, BOWED, AND SAID, "YOUR MAJESTY. THE QUEEN IS DEFINITELY WITH CHILD." EYES SHIFTED, FACES SHOWED CAUTIOUS ANIMATION, AS THE INNER COTERIE OF COURTIERS APPLIED THEIR WELL-PRACTICED ART OF LOOKING WITHOUT APPEARING TO LOOK AT THE KING. IN THEIR MIDST, FRAMED BY A SHAFT OF LATE SUNLIGHT THAT CREATED THE ILLUSION OF A HALO AROUND HIS FIGURE, THEIR ROYAL MASTER TURNED HIS HEAD AND FOR SOME MOMENTS REGARDED THE CHANCELLOR WITH SOMBER CONSIDERATION. THEN HE NODDED. HE DID NOT SPEAK.

The knot of courtiers parted, forming an aisle to the ornately carved doors, which at a hasty signal from the chancellor were flung fully open by the guardsmen outside. Pikes clashed in salute; the king ignored them, ignored all in his path, and left the chamber with the chancellor diligent at his heels. As the doors closed again, one courtier, who was young and naive and thus not yet fully *au fait* with this yearly ritual and its significance, cast a curious glance toward the window where the king had been standing. He asked, though not aloud, what his monarch found compelling in the vista outside, that it had absorbed him so deeply through the hours of waiting. It was only a garden. And the king did not even like flowers. Not that there were any flowers at this time of year, with winter still biting down on the world. The only things blossoming in the garden were a series of stone carvings, each in the shape of a spiral tapering heavenward, all but one — which was larger — to all intents identical in every way. Stone spirals, set between the formal box hedges like giant, incongruous seashells. The young courtier was aware of what they symbolized, of course. Remembrance; memorials to souls who had risen from this world and joined the gods in eternal bliss. But this was a time of rejoicing, not an occasion to dwell on death, and the king's preoccupation puzzled him.

BY LOUISE COOPER
ILLUSTRATION BY TOM CANTY

He shrugged his shoulders, unaware even that he did so, and returned his attention to less taxing matters. Across the room, one of his seniors with enough years and experience to understand and pity the naiveté of youth, observed the unconscious gesture and smiled ironically. The boy would learn a few lessons over the months to come, he thought. Each year it was the same. And if the pattern were repeated yet again, as he suspected it would be, there would be a few older heads on young shoulders by the time autumn came once more.

ALTHOUGH THE PALACE CORRIDORS WERE MUCH USED AT THIS TIME OF DAY, THE KING ACKNOWLEDGED NO ONE AS HE STALKED, WITH HIS CHANCELLOR STILL BEHIND HIM, TOWARD THE TOWER of Contemplation. The Tower had been named some centuries ago, with more than a touch of irony; for in the past it had been the residence — often the final residence — of felons who had considered themselves more fit to rule than their anointed monarch. "Contemplation" had been another word for "Repentance," and those who failed to repent within a given time had taken their last walk from the Tower's confines to the headsman's block. These days there was less call for such drastic measures; the royal dynasty had been established for two centuries and few were foolish enough, or even discontented enough, to oppose it. But the Tower and its title remained. Now it had a new, if temporary, function.

King and chancellor turned aside from the main corridors and into a long, narrow passage where there were no torches to augment the thin winter light. The passage turned twice, sharply, then there was a single, straight run before them, which ended at a locked and guarded door.

The king saw with arid satisfaction that his instructions had been followed to the letter. The two guards at the door were female, hard-eyed, and incorruptible and armed with sabers that they could and would use without compunction if the need arose. Between them, pacing the floor nervously and fingering the sash that proclaimed his rank and profession, was his personal physician.

"My liege." The physician made an elaborate bow.

The guards stared stonily ahead, trained to ignore their master until and unless he should require otherwise. The king's cold gaze raked over the physician, and he said without preamble, "It is true?"

"It is true, sire." Another bow; the physician's skullcap almost fell off and he snatched it without dignity back into place. "I completed the examination of Her Grace's person minutes ago, and the symptoms are beyond doubt."

"Good." The physician was not a married man, the king knew. His preferences tended in other directions, which was why he had been appointed to this task. "And a date?" the king added.

"It's impossible to be absolute in these things, of course, sire; but I would anticipate the likely parturition at or around Hunter's-Feast."

The king nodded. Easy enough, then, to calculate the day of the conception. He was satisfied, thus far.

"Very well." He made an imperious gesture to the guards. "Unlock the door."

The women snapped to attention; a key was inserted, grated in the lock, and the king entered the tower. For a moment, forgetting the circumstances, the chancellor made as if to follow, but a saber moved smoothly and significantly to bar the way and he hastily withdrew. His gaze met that of the physician; they shared an uneasy, almost sympathetic look. The door closed, and without the need to exchange a word the two men walked quietly away down the corridor.

THE TOWER HAD TWO ROOMS, ONE ABOVE THE OTHER. THE QUEEN WAS HOUSED IN THE UPPERMOST, AND WAS SITTING BY THE WINDOW AND STARING OUT AT THE BRIGHT BUT CHILLY AFTERNOON. SHE looked up when the king entered, and though her face betrayed no emotion, nor any clue to her thoughts, her gray eyes were steady as they regarded him. She was his second wife, much younger and considerably more beautiful than the first, who had died 20 years ago while attempting, unsuccessfully, to give birth to a live child. The king had not loved his first wife and, on one level, had little more interest in his second. But on another level, the new queen — though after two decades of marriage it was, perhaps, time for the "new" epithet to be set aside — was an intense and almost obsessive focus for his attention. For neither the king nor his spouse was growing any younger. Time was running short for them both. This time, the monarch was implacably resolved that nothing should go wrong.

"The physician tells me," he said, "that you are with child."

The fire crackled peaceably. The queen continued to gaze back at him. "Yes, my lord."

"He also tells me that the birth will take place at the time of Hunter's-Feast." A pause. "The likely date of conception corresponds acceptably enough."

Her cheeks flushed slightly and now she did turn away, so that he could not see her expression. "Yes," she said again.

Silence fell for several seconds. Then: "Your needs are fully attended to?"

"Yes. Thank you."

"If there is anything you require, your lady-in-waiting may relay a request to me. But *only* to me."

She said something under her breath, and his brows knitted frowningly together. "What? There is something you want?"

The queen drew a sharp, quick breath and said, "Only a measure of freedom, my lord. Freedom to walk in the garden — "

The king said, "*Ha!*" Nothing more; just a single, clipped sound that in itself was an absolute refusal. The queen fell silent and turned back to the window, and for a few moments he stood motionless, watching her with the blend of resentment, suspicion, and desire that he always felt in her company. Desire must be held in abeyance now, until her term was over. Resentment was an old companion, and of no importance. And suspicion ... well, he had done all that any human agency could do to see that there could be no grounds, no chance for doubt to flourish. Time, now, would be the only arbiter. If all went according to the plan he had so carefully laid, when summer gave way to autumn he would have a living heir.

He would have a living heir.

The queen still gazed out of the window. To him her face was inscrutable, though to anyone who had taken more trouble than he to know her well, some trace of her innermost thoughts reflected in a faint, bleak cast to her far-focused eyes. The king made a rough sound in his throat, part farewell and part threat. Then he left the room, taking care to lock the door behind him, and walked down the stairs to the guards and the corridor and the continuing business of his kingdom.

THE QUEEN'S LADY-IN-WAITING CAME TO HER, AS ALWAYS, AT SUNSET. SHE BROUGHT A SUPPER DESIGNED BY THE PHYSICIAN TO PROMOTE A HIGH DEGREE OF HEALTH AND STRENGTH, and watched as her mistress dutifully ate every morsel. Then she helped the queen to disrobe, changing her russet day-gown with its ermine trimming for a white silk night-shift and gray woolen shawl threaded with silver. She combed out her mistress's long dark hair, put soft slippers on her feet, and tied around her head the white matron's bonnet that would keep her head warm as she slept. Then she made up the fire, turned down the curtained bed and, unspeaking — for what was the point in speaking, when the queen so rarely answered? — returned to her own chamber on the level below.

The queen did not go to bed immediately. She snuffed out her candles, knowing that eyes would be watching the Tower from other parts of the palace, then returned to her customary place at the window and sat down once more.

The last of the sun was gone, and only a faint stain of color remained in the upper part of the sky. The night promised to be clear; soon the stars would show, and the vista on which she gazed would

take on the darker, stranger aspect that she had learned to love. The garden. *Her* garden.

She stared down at the formal pattern of hedges and gravel walks that formed a dimming mosaic in the dusk and, as she did each evening and morning and at other hours between, counted the spiral sculptures that showed pale against the darkening green. Twenty-six. One for each year of her own wedded life, six for the years of the first queen's truncated reign, and the single, larger monument that commemorated the former queen herself. Would there be a 27th? The court, those who knew at least a part of the truth, would pray daily that the number would not increase again. And the very, very few who knew the whole truth would not pray but would only watch, though they would take great care to keep their unease to themselves.

While she ... The queen's fine mouth tightened just a little, and the move made her look suddenly old beyond her years. Which perhaps she was, for though her knowledge of the wider world was small, what she had experienced throughout her marriage more than made up for her innocence of the broader canvas.

She closed her eyes suddenly as the most recent of those experiences rose in her memory. The moon had turned twice since that night just after Frost-Feast, but the ugliness, the brutality of it was still sharp in her mind, despite the fact that the indignity and humiliation were nothing new. There had been a banquet in the great hall, which she was not permitted to attend, and halfway through the evening the king had sent word to the Tower that she was to expect him an hour after midnight. Her lady-in-waiting had come; in silence the queen had changed her clothes and dressed her hair, and at the appointed time she had heard her lord approaching, accompanied by several of his more raucous courtiers. The courtiers were singing ribald songs whose words turned her stomach as she listened to them, and they had trampled through the spiral garden like pigs let loose in an orchard, shouting their own and their master's prowess to the indifferent night sky.

The king, though, was not drunk. Not entirely sober, but still in complete and glacial control of himself and his intentions. He was, she reflected, never anything less than that. He had climbed the stairs alone, he had entered this room, and without greeting or preamble had said, curtly, "You are ready?" She had looked away; it was consent enough and he stripped off surcoat and breeches and pushed her down on the bed. Her shrinking pain when he pinched and bit her breasts was enough to arouse him, and he took her forcibly and without a trace of tenderness or even the interest that a cruel lover might have taken in pleasuring himself at her expense. She endured, as she always did, and when it was done he had left her in the bed and sat in her place at the window, from where he could look at the antics of his sycophants who now were crudely serenading them both and inflicting more damage on the garden.

He had stayed for three hours, performed his duty on her three times, then left her with the parting comment that if there was anything she required her lady-in-waiting might relay a request to him, but *only* to him. The queen had lain as he left her, eyes focused on the canopy overhead but seeing nothing, ears soiled by the noise of the celebrating courtiers outside. Then when the revelers had been rejoined by their master and had at last gone away back to the banquet to celebrate their triumph, she had sat up and, with practiced expertise, made herself vomit into a bronze bowl set ready on her bedside table. In practice it achieved nothing; in principle it cleansed just a little of the taint she felt on her soul. Then, she had cried herself to sleep.

So: again the night and the time and the auguries had been carefully calculated, and again the royal seed had germinated within the garden of her body. She was with child. For the 20th time the king was to have an heir. And this time, for the first time, the queen would not need to pray for her husband's sanity when her time of deliverance came. This time, there was no room for doubt. This time, the child would live.

THREE MORE MONTHS PASSED, AND SPRING CAME TO THE WORLD. IT ARRIVED WITH A BLASTING ROAR OF A GALE THAT UPROOTED TREES, SNATCHED AWAY PRECARIOUS ROOFS AND SHOOK THE TOWER of Contemplation to its foundation; but there was a silver lining to the wind, for it also brought rain and warm air to drive out the last of winter's frosts. On its heels came softness, mildness, stillness. The young shoots that had cowered under the onslaught took confidence and began to grow. Hibernating animals dared, at last, to show themselves. And the new life in the queen's womb was growing.

The physician examined his patient every few days and reported each result to the king. All was satisfactory. The child was developing as it should. The king, who had repeatedly checked and rechecked his calculations and found no possible fault with them even by his exacting standards, began to unbend a little in his attitude toward his wife. Possibly the burgeoning season had some mellowing effect on his nature, or possibly it was simply that the cold inner voice of doubt was losing its grip. He took to visiting her more often, staying to talk for a while, and now and then even bringing some small gift that he thought would please her. Once or twice he even smiled at her. And one afternoon, when the sun warmed the Tower room and relieved its grimness a little, he agreed to her request that she might walk for a while in the spiral garden.

He did not, of course, permit her to go alone, but accompanied her himself. After months of close confinement, the queen was unused to exercise, and that combined with the thickening of her body made her ungainly in her movements. The king quashed his annoyance at this imperfection and concentrated instead on the play of light in her hair as, stiffly and formally, they paced together along the paths and between the neat green edgings, tracing out the pattern that a careful gardener had laid down decades before either of them was born. The queen did not converse, and answered her husband's few remarks only with a nod or a smile or, at best, a "yes" or "no." But she looked, hungrily and with a peculiar air of distraction, at everything the garden displayed, as though seeing it with the new eyes of one just delivered from blindness. And at 19 of the stone spirals she paused and murmured a name under her breath. A sad little list, like a litany. The king knew whose names they were, and felt the stirrings of a dark, angry demon in the depths of his mind, for he did not wish to be reminded of what was past and, literally and metaphorically, buried. But though he could have silenced her with one command, he stayed his tongue. Women in her condition had strange fads and fancies; if she wished to utter the names of her dead children it was doubtless merely her own talisman, a conciliatory gesture to ward off yet another misfortune. So he closed his ears to her quiet recitation, and looked beyond the garden wall to the main wing of the palace, and speculated contentedly enough about nurses and toys and suites of rooms and tutors and all the other trappings that his heir — his *living* heir — would need as he grew.

They completed one circuit of the garden, then the queen said respectfully that she had had her fill of walking. She felt tired and, with her lord's gracious permission, would like now to return to her Tower and rest. The king looked at her with a mixture of alarm and suspicion, but his momentary fear that she might have overexerted herself and damaged the child was swiftly quelled. She showed no signs of strain or discomfort; in fact her demeanor was calmer than he could remember having seen it in many a year. She looked *serene*, and, relieved, he turned without a word and led the way back to her prison and the waiting, impassive guards.

He did not come up to her room with her, and as she climbed the stairs with her lady-in-waiting in solicitous attendance, the queen gave mute thanks for that. It was bad enough to be forced to endure his presence in the garden that meant so much to her, without the added insult of having him linger here through some warped sense of duty. Or suspicion. When she asked to retire she had seen the look

in his eyes before he could mask it, and it only made her despise him more. A savage observation came to her tongue, and involuntarily she whispered it to the stairwell:

"You could have had your precious heir a long, long time ago. That choice was yours."

The lady-in-waiting, who had heard her voice but not her words, paused and said, "Madam?"

The queen made a canceling gesture, indicating that it was something of no moment and to be ignored. The lady-in-waiting was well-trained enough to forget what she should not remember, and so they continued on in silence.

Reaching her room the queen dismissed the lady, saying that she meant to sleep and did not wish to be wakened until the next designated mealtime. The door closed with quiet tact, and as the woman's footsteps diminished back down the stairs the queen did not, as usual, move either to the window seat or to her bed. Instead, she maneuvered herself awkwardly to her knees by the hearth, and her fingers pried at one of the smaller hearth stones, cool now that the kindly weather had made a fire unnecessary. The stone lifted, revealing a hollow chamber between the rafters of the room below, and the queen reached inside and drew out a small bundle, wrapped against dirt and decay in an oiled silk pouch. No other living soul had set eyes on this pouch and its contents, or even knew of its existence. The only other soul who had known of it — and, in fact, had procured it for her — had died shortly after the birth of the queen's last child. Or rather, had been executed on a trumped-up charge that no justice in the land would have accepted as valid. But the king was above justice, and the life of a servant, even the queen's servant, counted for nothing against the greater issue that had been at stake.

The queen unrolled the pouch. Inside were papers, written upon in black ink, in a meticulous hand. Words, and diagrams. They were very old, and she had never inquired how her late lady-in-waiting had come by them, for some questions were better left unanswered. But when the lady had died, and the queen's newborn son had died — the 14th boy; those who had arranged the royal match had predicted that her body would predominantly produce male children, and they had been right — she had finally found the courage to make the decision that she knew in her heart should have been made a long time ago. The decision to take matters into her own hands. The decision to rebel.

And the decision to claim vengeance for 19 innocent souls.

The knew the summoning words by heart, but still she read them again just to be sure that there would be no mistake, for mistakes, as her former lady had warned her, could bring disaster. The language was half familiar, for it was the old tongue of the land that passing centuries had changed and corrupted, and in her mind she ran silently through the peculiar pronunciations and oddities of dialect until she was sure that she would not falter. Or, if she did, that her faltering would be through fear and not through incompetence. After all, there was always fear in matters such as this. It was a part — albeit a small part — of the price that must be paid. But that price, *all* of it, was well worth the paying, for there was nothing else left to her now.

The Tower room was quiet. Outside the sun was westering, and the shadows of the stone spirals in the garden stretched across the paths and flowerbeds like fingers pointing to her window. Slowly, softly, calmly, and with something in her voice that carried an uneasy undertone of reluctant yet impassioned desire, the queen began to speak the words of summoning.

IT DID NOT HAPPEN UNTIL FULL DARKNESS CAME. SHE HAD EXPECTED THAT, AND PATIENCE WAS A VIRTUE WITH WHICH SHE WAS LONG FAMILIAR. FOR FORM'S SAKE SHE HAD LIT A CANDLE IN HER WINDOW, AS SHE ALWAYS DID, AND SHE sat upon the bed, face quiet, body quiet, waiting.

A small sound, like the crackle of a distant fire, heralded his arrival. The queen looked up, and was in time to see the dim, dark shape of him materialize beside the empty hearth. She heard his breathing, heavy, like the breath of some large animal. She saw the coarse mane of red-gold hair that framed his face and grew, too, over the massive shoulders and bulky arms and down the sharp-spined curve of his back. And she saw his eyes that glowed like live coals, and his full-mouthed, contented, lascivious smile.

He said, in the hoarse voice that she remembered: "Woman. Why have you called me again?"

Sickness churned in the queen's stomach, but she knew its causes and thrust the thought of it away. Her eyes met those of the demon, *her* demon, and she replied, "To be certain. To know that there can be no room for doubt."

He laughed, lazily. "You grow like your husband."

"No. I simply wish to reassure myself that our bargain stands."

"Oh, yes." She heard him shift his bulk a little, and the small sound both excited and repelled her. "Oh, yes, woman. It stands."

"My child will live."

"Your child grows, and it is healthy, and all is well."

"A boy."

The visitor inclined his head.

"And he will resemble the king."

Another soft laugh. "More than any who were born and died before him. More than the king's true children. You know I have that power."

She did; and even as it eased her heart it also sent a shaft of memory thrilling through her. The demon read what was in her mind, and his banked-ember eyes grew momentarily hotter, sharing the recollection.

To calm herself, and distract from the inner surge, she said, "I hate him."

"Of course. Or you would not have turned to me."

"Oh, I would. For I — " But she stopped then, realizing what she had been about to say; realizing the depth of the misery and frustration and thwarted yearnings that she had suffered for so many years.

He spoke the words where she could not. "For with me, there was another reward. With me, you knew pleasure for the first and only time in your life."

She could not deny it. She hung her head.

"Don't be ashamed," he said, almost gently; though such a being, she knew, could have no true compassion. "Why should you not also find pleasure in your search for retribution?" That inhuman smile widened. "And it was only once. It can only ever be once."

"I wish … "

"Ah, *wishes*. Your greatest and deepest wish has been granted; be content with that." He held out one hand; for an irrational moment she thought he meant to take her fingers in his and hold them, but then she saw the truth, saw the small, tightly rolled parchment that he displayed to her. A spot of blood — her blood — stained one corner. She could not see the other marks, made when she had opened her vein; the words, the promise, the pledge. But she remembered every syllable that she had written.

"Yes," she said. "I understand. I am content."

There was another heavy, shifting sound as the demon rose to his feet. "Then, if you are reassured, I will leave you." A pause, and to the queen's hectic imagination the atmosphere in the room chilled suddenly and ominously. "If you are wise, you will not call on me again. I have many demands on my time, and to spend it in trivial matters does not please me."

A shiver went through her. "I am sorry. I will remember."

She sensed rather than saw him smile. "Next time," he said, "*I* will summon *you*."

There was an untoward sound, like the boom of an old, slow gong somewhere far, far down in the palace's foundations. The queen blinked. When her vision cleared, the demon was gone.

She lay back on the bed, trying to quell the pounding of her heart. With his last words, the demon had reminded her sharply and emphatically of what she was to expect when her time came. All would be well with the birth; the child would be healthy, and it would resemble the king. But it would not be the king's child. Unlike the others, the others who had died, the others whose memorials she saw each day in her spiral garden, this last fruit of her womb would be no true heir to the kingdom, but something else. Some*thing* else.

And for the sake of the vengeance she would wreak through its creation, she would give her soul, and rejoice in the giving.

Very softly, she laughed. On the surface it was gentle laughter, recalling the carefree girl she had once been before the deathly shrouds of the court enfolded her, and before she had come to understand the true depths of her husband's jealous insanity. But underlying it was an edge that, in its way, betrayed a mind as deranged as the king's. How could she not be deranged, she asked herself detachedly, to have made such a bargain as this? No matter, no matter. Better madness, and then death, than what a queen's life had to offer her in this accursed place. Better that, than to see yet another child die for the sake of her husband's suspicion and mistrust. This time, he had taken every step that was possible to ensure that, even in his twisted mind, there could be no grounds for doubt. This time, he had no fear that the fruit of her womb was not his. And this time, like every other time, he was *wrong*.

The queen rose to her feet, not graceful now; nor ever graceful again, she thought, at least not in life. Afterward ... well, who could say? Not she. She would discover, when the time came. Whatever it was, whatever fate awaited her, it would be worthwhile. She walked to the window and looked out over the garden. The moon had risen, and its light etched the stone spirals in sharp relief against the softer contours of the bushes and flowers. Summer was approaching in earnest now. Summer, then autumn. The first queen had died in autumn, she recalled. She herself had been 16 then, hardly more than a child, but she remembered the dreary days of official mourning that had continued until Frost-Feast. A month later, the king's eye had fallen on her, and she had gone bewilderedly to the marriage altar and the marriage bed, to achieve for him what his late wife could not. Narrowing her eyes, she looked with sudden intentness at the single, larger spiral among the cluster of stones, and wondered if her predecessor knew of her and her story. It had been different for the first queen, of course. All her children had died and shriveled within her, even the last one that had sent her to the grave in her turn. There had been no question of *their* legitimacy. No question of infidelity or intrigue or deceit.

"But I was beautiful." She spoke aloud, though very softly, as if she were sharing a very private confidence with the woman whom she had never met. "*That* was the difference. That was why he did not trust. He denied it; oh yes, he did, and he would deny it still, if anyone had the courage to ask him. But no one asks, not now. No one dares. He is mad, you see. Mad and sick and ... evil." *And am I evil? Perhaps. But if I am, it is no less than he deserves.*

In the room below she could hear her lady-in-waiting stirring. Soon, she would bring food; nourishment and sustenance for a royal prince, and after that it would be time to douse the candle and sleep. The routine was as familiar and as lackluster as the lines on her own hand. She sighed, and spoke again to the silent garden.

"Nineteen children. That is what I bore him; 19, and each one healthy and sweet and *alive*." The screaming ordeals of those births were clear in her mind still; as was the image of her husband's eyes, cold and dead as something resurrected from beneath the earth, as he stared down at her where she lay exhausted from her travail and, in a voice of calm reason, called her slut and harlot and fornicator, before turning to the midwife and ordering the newborn infant to be taken away.

The boys, she knew, had been dropped into the old, fetid and long-disused well in the east courtyard, and left to sink or swim. Babies did not swim; or at least, not for long. The girls had received kinder treatment; their throats were cut, which was quicker and thus an example of the king's mercy. *Mercy.* Nineteen children. Nineteen sad proclamations that the royal heir had not survived the birth. Sorrow and sympathy and public grief, the king stricken, the queen prostrate ... Nineteen swift and discreet series of executions as those who knew and might tattle were dispatched to a better — or more convenient — place, while the few who knew and would not tattle went quietly about their proper business and forgot, with consummate and long-practiced skill, what they had heard and seen. Until all that remained to show that the queen's children had ever existed were 19 sculptures in the spiral garden.

And all because of one man's insane mistrust. All because the color of their hair was *wrong*. For each babe had been as dark as she was. Not one had inherited its father's fine red tresses, and the seeds of suspicion were sown as the king asked himself if they might, just might, be another man's.

The king, of course, had never believed in his heart — or in whatever icy travesty it was that beat under his ribs — that his wife was unfaithful. Had he done so, then she would have died with her first child. In truth the queen did not know how the seeds had taken root, for the beginning of it had been so long ago that memory could not be trusted now. But once begun, it had run away like a horse out of control, until its power over the king was such that it became second nature to him to take no chances. So, the children died and their father grew madder, while their mother kept her tongue and thus her head and submitted to the yearly ritual of birth and death that he forced upon her. Even now, when there *could* be no doubt, the ritual would be repeated yet again at this child's coming, if the sign the king craved was not there. But it *would* be there. The queen smiled to herself, remembering the demon's promise. He had promised, too, that she would live long enough to witness her husband's pleasure, and she relished that part of the bargain above all. His face. His smile. His satisfaction and his pride. She would laugh with him, as joyous as he. But he would never know the meaning of her laughter.

A soft scratching at the door announced her lady, who came in bearing a covered tray, her manner subdued as a mouse and solemn as a priest. Time to eat, then time to sleep. The queen smiled at her with more warmth and regard than usual, and when the business of setting out the food was done, the lady went away feeling gratified. A small kindness, the queen thought. The woman did her best, and she would not have to endure the boredom of her mistress's imprisonment for much longer.

She began, daintily, to eat the meal before her, to sustain the health of the child within.

THE QUEEN WAS BROUGHT TO BED IN THE SMALL HOURS OF THE MORNING OF HUNTER'S-FEAST. WHEN THE NEWS WAS ANNOUNCED, THE KING'S PHYSICIAN GAVE PRIVATE AND PROFOUND THANKS THAT Her Grace's timing had proved his own predictions almost to the hour, and went to the Tower of Contemplation, his face wreathed in smiles.

The queen was very calm. Natural enough, for the rigors of childbirth were nothing new to her, and the physician carried out an examination and assured himself that all was well before leaving the midwife and her women to the cruder necessities. The king, as always, was waiting in the audience room with his favored courtiers. He received the physician's report with a nod and no discernible change of expression, gave orders that he was to be informed when the child was delivered, then lapsed into his customary silence, staring out of the window. The physician withdrew. No one spoke. Everyone continued to wait.

The labor continued, with respite, throughout the day — then an hour after sunset the baby was born. The physician took one look at it and went running from the Tower and through the corridors to the audience room, almost colliding disastrously with the pikemen on guard as he reached the door. There was a brief scuffle, a breathless exchange of words, and the carved doors were flung open.

"Sire!" The physician stumbled to a breathless halt before the throne, and the courtiers held their own breaths as they saw the king tense and stare.

"What news?" the king demanded. His hand tightened on the throne's arms until his knuckles turned white. "*What news?*"

The physician's smile stretched from ear to ear. "A boy, sire! A little prince, healthy and lusty as any child ever born! And — he has red hair!"

She felt a shadow fall across her, and opened her eyes to see her husband standing at the bedside, gazing down at her and at the baby in her arms. By the candlelight she saw the glitter in his eyes, a gleam of eagerness, half-suppressed as yet but only waiting for his own sight to confirm the truth before it broke free. She counted to nine while he continued to gaze. Then, without turning his head, he addressed the hovering physician.

"Hold the child up. In the light."

The baby made a small, snuffling noise as it was lifted. The king stared at it. At its hair. The baby's mouth opened and closed gummily, as if it was trying to smile or even to laugh, and the index finger of the king's right hand twitched. The queen lay still, observing. Then the king's narrow lips curved. He was not accustomed to smiling, but for one such as him it was a passable effort.

"A son," he said. The smile grew wider. "I have a *son*." He turned to his wife, and now when he looked at her there was a new light in his eyes, a light of pleasure and, almost, of affection. "Well, madam. I am very gratified. I am very *pleased*." Then, perhaps remembering belatedly that she, too, had played her part, he added, "And you — you are well enough?"

The queen returned his smile. "Well enough, by your grace, my lord."

"Good. Good." The king studied the baby again, thinking of names and celebrations and nurseries and toys and tutors. His caution over all the preceding years was suddenly vindicated in his mind. It had been no more than caution; an unfortunate but rational necessity, and now fully justified by this happy outcome. His son. *His* son. Crown prince, and heir to a kingdom. At last, he was a contented man.

The physician ventured, "He is as like to your grace as could be, sire."

The king grunted tolerantly. "Like enough, I grant you." Then, to the queen, "I will have a gift fashioned for you to mark this occasion. A necklace, I think. Rubies. And a bracelet to wear on your wrist.

The queen said, "Thank you, my lord."

Satisfied, he stepped back from the bed. "Ensure that the queen wants for nothing. We shall celebrate. We shall *all* celebrate the birth of my son!"

He started to turn toward the door — then stopped as something beyond the Tower window caught his attention.

Outside, a wind had risen. The bushes, turning gold and just a little sere now that autumn had come, were rustling, and by the light of the rising moon and the torches in palace windows the garden was clearly visible. For just one moment it seemed to the king that the stone spirals, the memorials to other and less pleasant times which now could be put away, were gone. In their places, instead, 25 small figures gazed up at the window from which the king looked down. They were smiling. And among them, taller and deeply shadowed, yet clear to his eyes and shocking him with a stab of recognition, was the shade of his dead first wife.

The king drew in a sharp breath. He blinked — and the figures vanished. There was only the garden and the stones and the bushes stirring under the wind's touch. Illusions. They had been nothing more than illusions and tricks of the night. Or … and the king's composure returned fully at the thought … if there was significance in them, then they were surely a sign of good fortune, for they had smiled at him, as though conferring a blessing from beyond the grave. A blessing on him, and on his son.

The physician, who had seen the change in his liege but not the cause of it, ventured uneasily, "Sire … is something amiss?"

"Amiss?" The king regarded him, though his thoughts were clearly elsewhere. "No. All is well. All is *very* well."

The feasting was over, but wine was still flowing in the banqueting-hall when, at midnight, word was brought to the king that the queen was dead. The king received the news without overt emotion, only nodding slowly and continuing to gaze with obsessive pride at the tiny prince in the wet-nurse's arms. Tears sprang to the nurse's eyes, but a frown from the king stemmed them and she bowed her head over her charge again, settling herself more comfortably on her stool beside the throne. An unxpected relapse, the physician said, wringing his hands nervously, but a peaceful and, he was sure, painless departure from the world. Indeed, just before the moment of death the queen was heard to laugh very softly and gently. The king nodded again. A pity. His wife would not now see the prince grow, which was cause for sadness — but she had, at least, done her duty before death claimed her, and that was consolation. Sad for the prince to lose his mother. A mother was central to a child's wellbeing; it would therefore be advisable for him to marry again before too long …

Aloud, he said, "We shall mourn the queen when the prince's celebration time is over. Until then, there will be no public announcement of her passing." He reached out and touched the baby's face, tickling its chin. The baby beamed and gurgled; the king smiled back with abstracted pleasure, thinking of toys and tutors.

"My son," he said. "*My* son."

The crown prince is a sturdy boy now, almost 12 years old, and everyone declares that in all respects he is the image of his father. They do not know, and will not know for some years yet, how right they are.

The king has married again; a bride of a similar age to himself and thus too old to bear children, which suits him well and avoids any future problems of rivalry or worse. The prince is very fond of the new queen (as she is still known), and she of him, though sometimes she wonders privately at the uncommonly adult intelligence and insight of her stepson, who is after all still only a child. But then he has the best of everything, including the best of learning, for he will rule one day and must be worthy of his role.

The garden at the foot of the Tower of Contemplation is still diligently tended, and 27 stone spirals now stand among the flower beds. The memorial to the prince's mother is especially elegant; a token, perhaps, of the king's gratitude, or at least appreciation, for her final gift to him. The prince often goes to the garden, and always alone. He sits beside his mother's stone, and he recites to himself the names of all his brothers and sisters — or rather, *half*-brothers and *half*-sisters — just as his mother used to do. No one is permitted to disturb him in the garden; though he can be seen from the palace windows, smiling and happy and with the sun glinting warmly on his red hair. *So* like his father's. And when he has finished his recitation, the prince thinks about his 13th birthday, now not long away. At 13, he will be officially a man. Able to rule. Able to command. He has already made his plans for the first command he will give; an order to a stonemason, not within the palace but at a town some distance away. A skilled man, a craftsman, a consummate artist. The prince intends to commission a new spiral, one fit to commemorate a king. A king who will shortly discover the truth about "his" heir, and who will die of the discovery, in a slow, savage tidal wave of pain and terror. It is of no moment to the prince, but a promise is a promise, and he is, truly, his father's son. Another soul for the reaping. And when the screaming is over, 19 children and their grieving mother will be waiting to welcome their fallen lord to a new kind of existence that will never, ever end.

The prince walks in the spiral garden. He thinks his thoughts and he makes his plans; plans, too, for the kingdom that will soon be his to enjoy as he pleases. In many ways he is still a child, so it will amuse him to play, for a while, with this new and special toy. But he will grow up eventually, and when he does, the real enjoyment will begin.

Although whether the mortals of his court, and of his kingdom, and one day, possibly, of his world, will share the pleasure of their overlord, is a matter that is best, perhaps, not dwelt upon by prudent minds. ❧

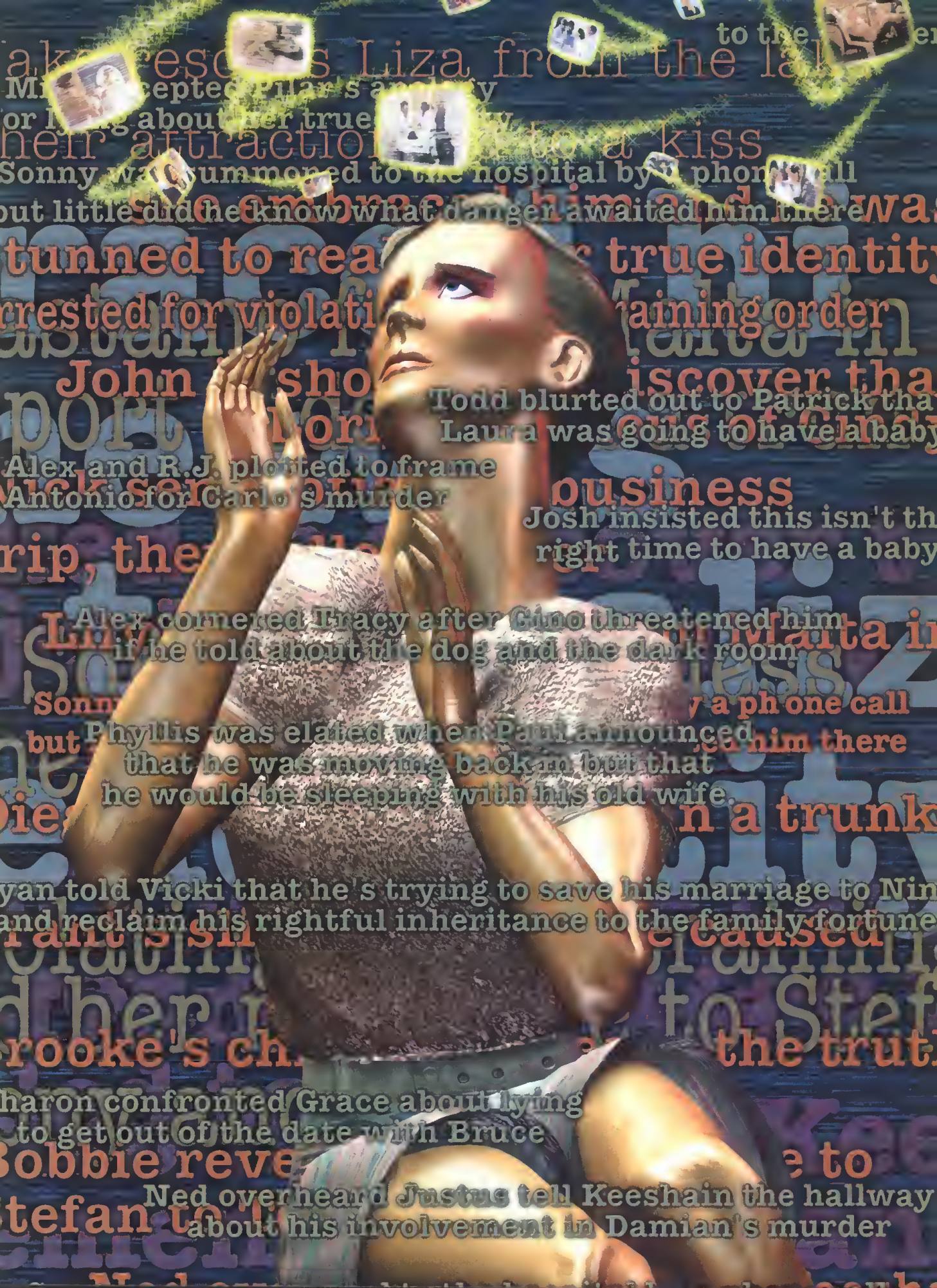
terry brooks
running with the demon
august 1997

david and leigh eddings
polgara the sorceress
october 1997

there's a bestselling fantasy
(or two) in your future



a division of ballantine books
http://www.randomhouse.com/delrey/


Todd blurted out to Patrick tha
Laura was going to have a baby
Alex and R.J. plotted to frame
Antonio for Carlo's murder
Josh insisted this isn't th
right time to have a baby
Alex cornered Tracy after Gino threatened him
if he told about the dog and the dark room
Phyllis was elated when Paul announced
that he was moving back in but that
he would be sleeping with his old wife.
yan told Vicki that he's trying to save his marriage to Nin
and reclaim his rightful inheritance to the family fortune
haron confronted Grace about lying
to get out of the date with Bruce
Ned overheard Justus tell Keeshain the hallway
about his involvement in Damian's murder

FADE OUT

Abby felt Krim's eyes bore into her as she stood by the window in the spare writers' office, a box on West 55th Street.

"Christ Abby! *Golden Dawn* did it, what? A year ago? We recycle that amnesia crap and the sponsors will kick our asses straight to the Flea and Tick Network!" he said, slamming down the lid of his laptop.

"I told you. It's not amnesia," said Abby, gazing at the lights of the George Washington Bridge, twinkling in the late summer sky. "Monica has a tumor. She needs brain surgery. We remove her temporal — whatever lobes. She wakes up. She starts over, like a child. No memory — no past."

"And then what?! Voila! She has a memory flash and — "

"She won't," said Abby. "A clean slate. She can be anything — or anyone—we want …," she added, drifting now. After a moment she turned back. "We do the operation during sweeps, Troy comes back — "

"Troy?! We threw Troy off a cliff seven months ago! Into an alligator-infested swamp in Cartanga!"

By Marnie Winston-Macauley

Illustration by Greg Carter

"*You* threw him off that cliff. You," she said, meeting the defiance she saw in those piercing blue eyes.

"The point is — he's chopped meat. Like this damn story line!" he said, teeth gritted. She remained impassive. "Abby — we put him in a box. He's fertilized half of Hillview by now!" he barked, referring to the mythical town that was the setting of their daytime drama *A Secret Soul*, better known to the soap mags as "SS" (the best they could do given the unfortunate choice of acronyms).

"We never saw the body on-air," she replied, soft-steel.

Coffee mug in hand, Krim stared at her.

"Check it." She nodded toward his laptop, unfazed. They both knew she was never wrong. Ever.

"Maybe if you'd get up to speed on a decent computer you could 'check it' yourself," he said.

"I think I've done pretty well despite it — for both of us. Until you fed Monica's lover to the alligators."

The scar below Krim's left temple was pulsing now. "That grave side monologue was the best work Heather Sue Andersen ever did as Monica — and you know it."

She stared at him. Ice.

"Ratings, Abby. February. Highest. Seven months."

"Ah, but those 'Ides of March.' Poof. Gone. The ratings. Her lover. All gone. All except Heather."

Shit, he thought. Dangerous muck ahead. He put on his boots and tread carefully, inside the lines. "And you think bringing Troy back in a Hefty bag while our diva slobbers over Hillview is going to dig us out …? Won't fly, Abby."

"Our 'diva' was buried alive in a Cartangan tomb, took an acid bath to cover that nose job she had last spring. And of course — her 15 affairs. At last count," she added as he winced. "I think our viewers would welcome a new, improved Monica. Our star-crossed lovers unite. And start over." He shifted uncomfortably. "Unless you have something against that, too? Ah right. No drama. No passion. No … edge."

Krim glared at her for a long moment. "Could it be Abby Greene, premier head writer, is burning out — or losing her objectivity …?"

Abby looked at him ironically, then wandered again to the window. Unconsciously, she fingered a script she had been holding and, as always, took comfort from the feel of the crisp yellow paper as she watched the matchbook cars wind their way up the West Side Highway.

"Monica needs to get out of the spotlight. Get it right, for once. Live … happily ever after." She turned to him, eyes blazing. "That, we've never done. And that, we'll do."

They stood there in silence.

"You're going to screw me, Abby," he murmured.

"Never. We're a team, remember? I'll make this work. For us." Their eyes locked. "Haven't I always …?"

Bitch, he thought. He watched her brush a lock of curly auburn hair from her still pretty 40-ish forehead. Like that little girl with the curl. Bitch, he thought.

He turned away slowly and reached for his jacket.

"Good. We can call it a day then she said lightly God, I'm starved. Think I'll pick up some moo shu pork, then soak in a hot tub. "Unless there's something else …?"

He looked at her. "It's after nine. Did you check on the kids?"

"Of course, darling. Don't I always?"

Their eyes met briefly once again. Then he watched grimly, as his wife walked briskly past him out the door.

AS ALWAYS, ABBY SAT ENGROSSED AT HER OLD COMPUTER, A FIXTURE on the kitchen table, scripts cluttered among the empty soda cans as she talked to herself in barely audible tones.

"Still 'muthering' I see?" said Mimi, her 15-year-old, as she bounded in, then plopped on the sideboard, splashing a Pepsi dangerously close to the machine.

Abby jumped. "Dammit Mimi! You almost —," then quickly summoned calm: "Please clean this mess up. Then I'll be happy to talk to you — after I finish this. In the living room."

Mimi folded her arms and settled in. "H E L L O! This is supposed to be a home. And it's supposed to be Sunday. Like you could give a shit. Jeez, even Krim the Frim's diddling with *The Times* crossword puzzle." Abby flinched as Mimi careened off the sideboard, knocking over the fruit bowl. "My day off. Let the maid do it tomorrow. Or you do it," Mimi said, tossing her mother a roll of paper towels.

As Abby looked at her daughter in torn jeans and T-shirt, her young, gray eyes so unyielding, she grew suddenly weary.

She heard the strains of a long-ago tune playing in her head lightly. Her own 12-year-old voice singing softly. "*Daddy dear, daddy dear, is the world really round? Can the bluebird of happiness…?* " and under the tune she saw a late summer day in her parents' back yard. She could smell the grass, the green grapes, and her long-dead father, salt and warm pillows, sitting on the wood bench next to her, picking up the duet in a strong, sure voice. "*Daughter dear, daughter dear, yes the world's really round. And the bluebird of happiness …*"

"Well?" Mimi's voice cut through. "I thought you were bursting to clean it up." Abby restrained the impulse to slap her, instead carefully applying the words the therapist used. "You had the accident. Your mess, your job."

"Well maybe if you left your 'muthering' at the office for a change, accidents wouldn't happen — mother."

Abby winced. And sopped up. "I hate it when you butcher the language. That's not what I pay Briarly $15,000 a year to teach — "

"Not 'butchering,' mother — 'creating.' 'Muthering' is a perfectly good, not to mention useful, contraction for what you do. 'Muthering and muttering.'"

"Is there something I can do for you?" asked Abby, checking her impatience, "Because I really need to — "

"New story line's got you bugged, huh?" said Mimi, hopping back on the sideboard with a flourish. "What's it this time? Our courageous Dr. Dan battles liver spots? I mean, talk about the granny set. They're the only ones who watch *A Secret Soul* any more," she said, as Abby winced.

"Well, you know I'm right. Jeez! I'm ashamed to tell my friends what you do. You and Krim the Frim. Last week I actually lied. I told Maeve you still wrote *A Golden Dawn*," said Mimi tossing a rolling grape into her mouth with a satisfied pop.

Abby searched her daughter's face. "You're really enjoying this, aren't you?"

"Just telling it like it is," said Mimi, meeting her gaze head-on.

Abby shook her head. Over the years, she penetrated the souls of thousands of characters; yet this one, her own 15 year old, eluded her. How did she lose control of the dialogue, she wondered. "Go check on your brother," she sighed. "His math project's late and it's too quiet up there."

"He's probably got his head stuck in the toilet," said Mimi, now whittling away at her left index finger with an emery board.

Abby started. "Don't tell me he's throwing up again?!"

"Yup. The barfster's back," said Mimi, glancing up pointedly. "Two whole weeks now." Abby felt her cheeks burn. "Got to hand it to the Ollie though. Phat story line! 'Will Dr. Dan make it with the barf bag before poor Oliver Reinholdt tosses his cookies on the playing fields of Hillview?' I mean, is this not a dynamite social issue? There must be at least, what … ? Seven 9-year-old boys out there facing the heartbreak of bulimia. We could be talking Emmy here— "

"I'm going up," said Abby, reluctantly thrusting herself away from her computer.

"Get real, mother. He'll just lie to you like always. I'll do it," said Mimi, hoisting herself down from the sideboard.

Abby started to protest. Then, realizing her daughter was right, she retook her place, relieved despite herself. "Look, find out what's going on up there, and be gentle, okay? But firm. We can get him through this if — "

"I know how to talk to him," said Mimi, eyes rolling. "I'll 'save' Ollie. You save Hillview. Right …?" Not bothering to wait for an answer, she kicked the door open and disappeared into the hallway.

Abby watched the large door swing to and fro, rhythmically mocking. She looked around the huge work kitchen, all white and

shining chrome; her workroom, since surrendering the elaborate wood-paneled office to Krim when they married 11 years ago. She actually preferred working here. In a kitchen where the light streamed through the window during hazy September dawns. Where the scent of salt and green grapes turned to crisp, ruled paper and promise. Dawn was her favorite time. When she could be alone to think.

"Still up, sweetheart ...?"

The 12- year-old girl looked up at her father and reluctantly pulled her fingers from the old Royal and the story she had been laboring on since school let out in June. "I still can't get the last part right." The large, tender man slid in next to her on the old kitchen bench.

"You mean whether the bird with the broken wing ever flies home again?"

She shrugged thoughtfully. " The little girl believed if she loved him enough she could fix it. And even after he could fly, he'd come back to her, and they'd ...," her voice trailed.

" ... live happily ever after?", The young girl nodded. "Then what's the problem, honey?" he asked gently.

"I don't know. Maybe — she didn't do a very good job. Or maybe she was too afraid to wish hard enough," she said quietly.

Her father grew pensive watching her troubled face. "If she fixed it well — perfectly, he'll come back."

She looked at him anxiously and he took her hand. As always, she took comfort from the feel of her small hand in his.

"You can make it come out any way you want, if you believe hard enough — because you're special," he said, eyes blazing.

"Remember that, bluebird." He kissed her forehead, then wearily padded out.

It was to be the last time they talked like that. Eight days later Ben Greene had a heart attack at his cubicle in the Flushing Post Office; his own dusty, unfinished novel tucked below the requisition forms in the right-hand drawer of his tiny desk. He lay in a coma for 10 days. Abby stayed by his bedside, and wished harder than she had ever wished before.

On September 21, the first day of fall, her father died. Anyway.

But she remembered.

As Abby watched the huge door, winding down now, she felt the familiar anxiety rising. And swiftly turned to her computer. Suddenly the door swung open again and Krim stormed in.

"What the hell's going on?! Your daughter just announced Ollie's throwing his guts up again. Dammit, Abby! What the hell do you intend to do about it?!"

She started to explain, but this time, she didn't have the words. And even if she did, she realized he couldn't hear her. Not any more.

"Mimi's up there. And we have a story line to pitch. So if you're done with *The Times* crossword — "

"Don't lay that crap on me. This is your baby."

"Ours. Look, we're a team. And I could use your input. That is the way most writers work," she added evenly.

"Well I don't! Not any more," he said coldly, refusing to give in to the feelings she was provoking.

It was still between them. Even after a decade.

How they met, when she was an Emmy-winning associate head writer on *A Golden Dawn* and he was a struggling playwright. How he attended a lecture she gave on daytime drama at N.Y.U. How she took in every detail of this brooding man in the audience: his dark beard, the scar just below his left temple, the intense blue eyes that never seemed to leave hers. How this scruffy man, a few years younger than she, hung back. Watched, as she fielded the same tiresome questions in the corridor. Watched, as she felt the heat rise against the collar of her Armani blouse. Then quietly moved her apart with the words: "Most soaps are crap. You don't write crap. That's why I'm here. I want to know how you do it. I want to know you," he said, powerful, in control. How the beer with Krimmer Reinholdt at the Cafe Figaro, the only date she'd had since her first passionless marriage whimpered to an end a year earlier, led to coffee in his dingy walk-up in Jersey City the next morning. And the next — in her huge co-op on Central Park West. And the months of private tutoring she gave him: scripts spread out on a blanket in the park, as she fed him from the picnic hamper she'd carefully constructed from Petrossian; corrected his work, his head on her lap, in front of the fire after her daughter was tucked in for the night. After she made love to him with more abandon than Abby Greene had ever known existed — or written. How she recommended him to fill that opening on her show for a writer. How, after their hasty wedding in City Hall, she privately edited his scripts until his dangerous curves were honed — enough. And his torn Sears jeans and Ts were replaced by A/X and ties. How his quiet confidence, his edge, impressed the corporate suits at Howell & Carruthers, the sponsor. How, after Ollie was born, she was offered the head writing position at *A Secret Soul*, the sponsor's other show, and she accepted — only after convincing the brass that despite his inexperience, she and Krim would make a special team — the perfect team — once her cautious mind reigned in his dark passion.

And how he never forgot — exactly what she did.

And she never forgot — he never said "I love you." To her.

"Right. You don't work that way," said Abby levelly. "So, since you need me to finish this script, first I'll take care of the show, then our son." Their eyes met briefly. Then he turned and walked out of the room wordlessly.

She felt a silent scream rising. They were all there now. The fears. Wailing for attention like inmates in some surrealistic snake pit. The kind that haunt that secret window between waking and sleeping; thundering like a herd of wounded animals' 'til you rise in a sweat, searching for an anchor. Something to tell you who you are again.

Abby quickly turned her computer back on. Hearing the familiar hum she took a deep breath, then called up her script and scanned her last entry.

(ACT 3C: MONICA LIVING ROOM. AM. MONICA ON SOFA WITH DR. DAN)

DR. DAN: Exactly how long have you been having these dizzy spells ...?

MONICA: It's nothing. With the fashion show coming up, I've been on overload, maybe skipping a few meals

DR. DAN: (CONCERNED) Level with me, kiddo. What's going on?



ABBY FELT THE KNOT IN HER CHEST tighten. She couldn't think. She had a bad headache, the pain shooting from her neck, tiny needles stabbing behind her eyes. Her anxiety deepened, consuming her now. She rose to get the sedative she kept over the cabinet, reaching automatically to hit the SAVE key. As always, she glanced quickly at the machine to make sure her maneuver was completed. Then stopped.

On the lower perimeter, a line she had never seen before appeared under her copy, with the words ACCESS GRANTED:CONTINUE.

She banged the SAVE key several times, but there it stayed. "Damn, " she murmured, more alarmed than irritated.

Abby was dragged kicking into this new world of computers. She loved her old typewriter — the sound of crisp paper as it inched up, tight against the guides. It helped her create, she said. And even when her colleagues extolled the virtues of these wondrous new machines, she stayed locked in a belief system that defied her reputation for logic.

Then one night, Krim coaxed her to face his IBM/XT. And where fear once reigned, love conquered. She made the primitive conversion. But that was as far as she would risk it.

Heart pounding, she now faced that same machine with its outmoded program and called up the menu. Nowhere could she find the strange command. Near panic now, she anxiously re-read the last line she had written.

DR. DAN: (CONCERNED) Level with me, kiddo. What's going on?

AFRAID TO LEAVE THE MACHINE, SHE TRIED TO CONTINUE. NOTHING. Nothing was coming! Terrified, Abby knew this wasn't just a small gap, the kind writers struggle through with a jog, a catnap, or a shot of scotch. This was something else.

She had — stopped.

Abby stared at the screen and the strange command, bold now, flashing, slowly drew her.

ACCESS GRANTED:CONTINUE.

ACCESS GRANTED:CONTINUE.

Suddenly she felt lightheaded. The words of her script starting swimming, fading in and out until she could see them no more. She heard a dissonant hum; a crackling, like the static on a car radio entering a tunnel. Behind her eyelids tiny points of light darted in the corners of her mind, their rhythmic dance in odd sync with the static. She tried to shake it off, but couldn't make contact with her body; as if it had fragmented — a mind no longer cased in palpable substance; her senses seemed split. On the top layer, she viewed this with distance, as if she were floating parallel to it, watching it unfold; a subliminal Cinerama. Yet a deeper part of her felt pulled, seduced by the sensory illusion.

Then, just as suddenly, the words on her computer re-crystallized in her field of vision. The ACCESS GRANTED:CONTINUE. was red now, urgent; compelling her fingers to the keyboard, compelling the words

MONICA: IT'S ... TROY. I KNOW THIS SOUNDS CRAZY, BUT I CAN — hear him. Calling ...

DR. DAN: Not so crazy. Given the horrible way he died, it's not surprising you'd dream —

MONICA: (STANDS SUDDENLY) No! This is so vivid. His voice. I — (SHE HAS A DIZZY SPELL. DR. DAN LAYS HER ON SOFA)

DR. DAN: YOU have to take care of yourself, young lady. Now relax. (SHINES LIGHT INTO HER EYES, THEN LOOKS AT HER, TROUBLED)

MONICA: (NERVOUSLY JOKES) I AM going to live, right ...?

DR. DAN: (COVERS CONCERN) Would I let anything happen to the most gorgeous gal in town? But I would like to check you out. I'll even throw in a deluxe "suite" at Hillview General.

MONICA: But the fashion show —

DAN: (FIRM) Your new assistant, Moira, can tie up any loose ends. (DR. DAN MOVES TO PHONE, CLOSE-UP ON MONICA, WEAK AND ALARMED. THEN FADE IN THE FOLLOWING SCENE:

A DARKLY BEARDED TROY, MAKING HIS WAY THROUGH THE JUNGLE, HIS TORN JEANS AND T-SHIRT CATCHING ON BRAMBLES. A SHARP ONE TEARS AT HIS FACE. HE FALLS, CRIES OUT. HE REACHES INTO HIS POCKET, PULLS OUT A TATTERED NOTE. IT FLUTTERS OUT OF HIS HAND AND LANDS IN THE BRUSH. CLOSE-UP ON NOTE, WE HEAR THE WORDS IN HIS VOICE)

TROY: "Monica, I never should have left you. Please darling, keep believing. Believe I'll find my way back to you ... and give you all the happiness you deserve. I love you, Bluebird."

(AS TROY STRUGGLES TO FIND THE NOTE, HE WIPES THE BLOOD FROM THE WOUND THAT WILL BECOME A SCAR JUST BELOW HIS LEFT TEMPLE.

FADE TO MONICA, WHOSE SCREAMS SHATTER THE AIR AND REVERBERATE)

AS ABBY TYPED FURIOUSLY, HER FINGERS WILLED TO FLY AMONG the keys, she heard the screams spilling out, spilling over. It was then she realized.

The sounds were coming from her.

The words ACCESS GRANTED:CONTINUE. were flashing dark red. Her fingers still on the keyboard, she was leaning in urgently, letting the words guide her

(MONICA, WRACKED WITH SOBS, SUDDENLY COLLAPSES. ON MONICA, UNCONSCIOUS. FADE OUT)

THE WORDS NOW RAN TOGETHER IN HER MIND. HER BODY TAUT, Abby hit the SAVE key. Suddenly the strange command vanished. Shaking, she carefully saved her copy as usual, then called it up again. It was all there. Saved! She let out a deep sigh, her body resonating with relief. And as the realization dawned, the relief turned to hope. Then, determination. Trembling, she carefully saved it once again. Except this time, she added a password: BLUEBIRD.

THE NEXT FEW WEEKS, ABBY WAS EVEN MORE OBSESSED THAN USUAL, leaving her computer only to hand scripts to Krim, who grew more agitated over the upcoming meeting with their executive producer. And his wife's bizarre behavior. Each time Abby did surface, she was calmer than the time before — than he had ever seen her. Even his slings failed to evoke a shadow in those determined, hazel eyes.

Because Abby Greene knew, this time, she just might fix it. If she could believe hard enough.

KRIM AND ABBY SAT ACROSS THE DESK FROM THEIR EXECUTIVE PRODUCER, Charlie Howell. All were focused on the TV monitor in the large office, watching the actors go through their paces during rehearsal from Studio 32 downstairs.

Heather Sue Andersen, a k a Monica, and her assistant Moira, played by the nubile, young Jan Peters (*Daytime Digest*'s pick for "Most Dishy Newcomer") were reading their dialogue on the set of Monica's Design Studio. Monica was saying, " ... I just felt a little light-headed. Really, it's nothing." They heard Moira reply, "No way. You look like hell, Monica. I can finish whatever needs to be done for the fashion — "

Suddenly, Heather swung around and broke character.

"Hold it! Dave!" she yelled at the director in the booth. "What's with this 'dizzy' crap?"

"It's the start of the new story line. Didn't you read the script, Heather?"

Her cheeks burned briefly. "I have to keep my work fresh, dammit!" she shouted, the curlers in her hair wobbling wildly. "And I'm supposed to look like hell? I don't think so," she said, flinging her script against the set door.

Charlie jumped up and snapped off the monitor, two pulsating veins near his temple standing at attention. He cleared his throat, then fingering the document Abby had just given him, turned to her. "A few weeks ago, I backed you on leg one, Monica's illness. But the rest of it, the surgery, memory loss, starting over with Troy Look, I'll study this, then pass it along to the others before the story meeting next week," he said, then hesitated. "Abby ... I'm going to level with you. If it doesn't dazzle them, convince all of us it can pull the ratings up, particularly the 18-49 'women — '

"It will," said Abby, as Krim sat in grim silence. Charlie glanced at him.

They were interrupted as Heather, now in full makeup and perfectly coifed, burst in. "Charlie! About this new story line — " Seeing Krim, she quickly switched from ranting diva to demure fawn, as the producer quickly ushered her out the door.

"What's the problem this time?" he asked, not bothering to hide his annoyance.

"You know I hate being difficult, but 'dizzy spells' ...?! My fans would have a fit!"

As she stood there agitated, Charlie noticed how the lines around those famous eyes seemed deeper lately; her golden mane, lackluster. Like her performances recently. "Phoning it in" was the phrase that sprang to mind. At $9,200 a week.

"Look, we're winding up some — "

"I'll wait. I'd like to talk to Krim," she said pointedly, then marched off to the phone in the adjacent reception area, as Krim and Abby watched from the office.

Charlie walked back in and glanced meaningfully at Krim. Cheeks on fire, Abby shot up. "Think I'll check out the new design set. I'll ... meet you back here ..." The producer sighed as she grabbed her briefcase and rushed out, slamming the door behind her.

Trembling, Abby started rapidly down the corridor, then stopped at the sound of Heather's voice, talking loudly on the phone to

someone whose name Abby recognized as a top soap agent. Unseen, Abby studied the actress, a hand running through the famous mane, the perfect legs perched on a desk, assuring the listener that "Krim would take care of it." And in her tone, unmistakable confidence. The confidence of ownership.

Suddenly Abby felt her heart race. She had to break away — force herself away. She quietly moved past the reception area and headed down the winding corridor, stopping to take a cool drink at the water fountain.

Before she started back, she saw the office door open and close as Krim emerged alone. Saw Heather run toward him, as Abby, from her hidden place stood — watching. Saw Krim glance around quickly, take Heather in his arms. Saw him gently whisper to her — soothing, powerful, in control. Suddenly, from somewhere in the back of her mind, the computer command emerged, distorting her field of vision.

ACCESS GRANTED:CONTINUE .

ACCESS GRANTED:CONTINUE .

In the distance, behind the flashing words, the two figures at the end of the corridor gradually grew hazy — then impersonal. Two strangers now, intertwined, melding in shadow.

How lovely, she thought wistfully. Like a perfect greeting card. Her eyes grew soft, as she continued watching from some distant place inside her.

She had no idea how long she remained by that fountain. It was only when she felt the droplet of water that she turned back, profoundly disturbed. Turned to see who had interrupted. But there was no one. The drops were flowing freely now. Spilling down her blouse, her skirt, onto her briefcase. And with a start, she realized.

They were tears.



FTER A LONG, HOT BATH, ABBY padded into the familiar kitchen, her old bathrobe tied around her. Still fighting the image she had spied in the corridor earlier, she glanced at her unplugged phone and breathed deeply. She needed to focus, concentrate. Slowly, she took her seat by her computer, and meticulously following the procedure she had honed over the past few weeks, she willed herself to relax, let her mind become a warm, inviting space. Mechanically, she called up her last script entry. The now-reassuring command swam into view under her copy.

ACCESS GRANTED:CONTINUE .

ACCESS GRANTED:CONTINUE .

She leaned into it as she typed, as always, letting the flashing command guide her. A week before the story meeting. Somehow, she had to break through a small pocket of resistance that prevented her from fully exploring the arc between herself and the computer. She could do it, if —

Suddenly the door swung open and Krim entered, seething. Her concentration broken, she quickly looked up as he approached.

"Bong, bong, bong. Seven o'clock. Do you know where your children are?"

Summoning calm, she quickly switched off her computer. "Mimi was picking Ollie up from school at three, then taking him to McDonald's — "

"Wrong! Hard to believe, but you — are wrong." He leaned over and toyed with a lock of her hair, twisting it between his thumb and forefinger, then abruptly let it fall awkwardly over her forehead. She remained perfectly still, waiting.

"They showed up, at the studio. Looking for you. Funny. So was I. After you bolted out leaving me holding the bag. I waited in that damn office, with Charlie Howell breathing down my neck for over an hour!"

Her mind quickly flashed to the scene in the corridor.

To Krim taking Heather in his arms, whispering to her. Two lovers, as she stood —

Krim's voice broke through. "Well? Where the hell were you!"

Abby looked at him steadily. "Here. Writing. You heard Charlie. I have to make this work for us, or — "

"Don't!" he spat out, lethal now. "Dammit! It's not about 'us,' Abby. It's about what Abby Greene wants ... the 'perfect' team — "

"What I want, what I've always wanted, is what's best. For us. We're in real trouble, Krim." She met his gaze levelly. "And of the two of us, who is going to fix it ...?"

He stared at her, stung. Eyes burning, he moved to the counter to retrieve a scotch bottle.

"Now, about the kids ...?" she asked.

His back still to her, he poured a drink. "Ollie had another 'incident' at school — "

"Vomiting ...?"

Turning, he held up his scotch in salute. "How quickly you forget your own euphemisms, dear. Barfing is an 'accident.' Biting first-graders is an 'incident.'" He watched her flinch.

"It seems when the guidance counselor was unable to reach you," he said, glancing at the unplugged phone, "your daughter was so 'bummed' out, she grabbed Ollie and they paid a visit to her buddy, Jamal Robinson — " Abby started. "Where Jamal's papa had a heart-to-heart with them about going home. Unfortunately, the thought of returning to our happy hearth caused Ollie to barf up a storm." He took a swig.

"Since your daughter couldn't find you, she got through to me — in Charlie's office, which is how they wound up at the studio at exactly 5:00 PM. And since mom was nowhere to be — "

Suddenly the kitchen door swung open and Mimi sauntered in, dragging her sullen, nine-year-old brother behind her.

Abby looked at Ollie anxiously. "Are you all right ...?"

"He's fine, Mother," said Mimi. "Now."

Abby turned to Ollie. "Honey, I'll handle this, make sure it doesn't happen again."

His back to her, the small, dark boy headed for the fridge. Swallowing hard, she approached her son. "Look, I'll work this out ... speak to that guidance counselor, Mrs. " she fished for the name.

"Hannah," supplied Mimi with a smirk."Two 'Hs.' A palindrome, muther — so it's real easy to remember."

Ignoring this, Abby continued, "I'll call her tomorrow, work it all — "

Ollie moved past her, kicked open the door and disappeared into the hallway with a large tub of ice cream.

"Ollie ...! You haven't had dinner — " Abby yelled at a swinging door.

"Yup, he has," said Mimi. Abby looked up. "We all have. With Heather." Abby swung around to Krim, as Mimi continued, undaunted. "When we got to the studio and Heather saw — correction — *smelled* poor Ollie — she practically dragged the three of us to her place.

She is *so* phat! After dinner, she showed us some of her old shows, then she let Ollie act out some of the parts. You should've hung out longer, Krim. But he was so pissed at you," she said to Abby, "he split early and told us to grab a cab." Sauntering to the door she stopped and turned to her mother, still stunned.

"Oh, and Ollie's math project? Jamal's mom got him to do it. Amazing. The barfster didn't throw up once. 'Til he heard we were going home. But she's helping him with his history report on Saturday, so"

"What ...?" said Abby, voice cracking.

"They invited us for the weekend, longer if we want. Heather too. 'Her casa is our casa' — or something — "

"But ... you can't!" Abby croaked.

"Yes! We can ... and we will," said Mimi, with a resolve Abby had never seen in those young eyes before.

"But ... I can take care of Ollie. Both of you," said Abby hoarsely.

"It's been taken care of, mother."

"But you need me to — "

"No! We don't. *We don't need you, mother.*"

The words tore through Abby like an ice pick. Mimi stared at her for a long moment, and for the first time, her eyes softened.

"It's okay … mom. Really," she said, with a simple wisdom that touched off a truth in Abby so profound, it made her shudder. And Mimi disappeared out the door.

"Well," said Krim. "So much for the Junior Varsity. Yay team." He took a long swig and quickly walked out.

Shaking, Abby walked mechanically back to her computer, Mimi's final words still reverberating in her head. Eyes blazing, she once again willed herself to focus — open her mind completely. She called up her script. And once again, it began as the command swam into view.

ACCESS GRANTED:CONTINUE .

ACCESS GRANTED:CONTINUE .

She yielded, bracing for the disruption, and the calm that would follow and guide her fingers. But this time, under the crackling jumble, Mimi's words were chanting in soft counterpoint. "… don't need you, mother … don't need …. " With each word, Abby felt herself pulled deeper, layer by layer, granting her access to a core place she had resisted entering. And as she felt herself surging forward, instead of subsiding as usual, the static swelled; a throng of mechanical bees buzzing, building to a crescendo, as the pixels grew into fireworks, merging with the sound. One mammoth, driving force, rolling toward her, gripping her, finally detonating an explosion that shredded her into a million tiny charged fragments.

ABBY OPENED HER EYES SLOWLY. AT FIRST ALL SHE SAW WAS A SINGLE sheet of white light. Then, slowly, the white sheet took on form.

And became a man. A concerned man in a crisp white coat, standing over her, taking her pulse.

"Welcome back," he said, smiling softly.

Reeling, Abby tried to sit up from her prone position on the bed, but the hazy man in the white coat gently restrained her. "Just calm down. You're in the hospital. You've been here for a few weeks," he said.

Slowly, Abby looked up at the man, whose features were starting to clear. And then she saw. The kind smile first, then the warm brown eyes. Her heart started to pound furiously.

"Tell me …," she asked, afraid to believe.

"Hon, you need surgery. I won't kid you … there are risks. Which is why we've scheduled it three weeks from Friday — when you're stronger." He took her hands. "But I promise, I'll do everything in my power to make sure you come out of it — like new. And you know when Dr. Dan makes a promise, he keeps it, Monica."

"MONICA!" It ripped through her like a lightning bolt.

"And I've got some news. Good news." Dr. Dan continued. "We have reason to believe Troy is alive. There was a note from him — to 'bluebird.' So you see, you've got everything to fight for, Monica, he said, smiling reassuringly.

"I … made it … really made it," Abby murmured, as tears of joy spilled down her hospital gown.

"And we're going to keep it that way, kiddo," said Dr. Dan. "Then, after the surgery, you'll have a whole new life — "

Suddenly she heard the sound of a refrigerator door opening — another voice invading. Frantically, she tried to push the intrusion away, but she felt the old anxiety rising, pulling her back. She struggled to catch the top of what Dr. Dan was saying, but the invading sound grew louder, eclipsing his words, until she couldn't hear him at all. Then, as his image started to blur, she saw her own start to break up, until there was nothing left but an empty bed melding back into a single wall of light. In a panic now, Abby started to scream —

"CHRIST! WHAT'S WITH YOU?" ABBY BOLTED UP AND SAW KRIM steadying a plate of cold chicken. "First you don't answer me, then you scare the hell out of me! Get a grip, 'teammate,' before the story meeting next week, preferably." He kicked the door open and disappeared into the hallway.

Trembling violently, Abby looked at her computer screen. It was there! Every word Dr. Dan had said. Every word she had spoken. She started heaving violently. Three weeks from Friday. Three more weeks to learn to control her vaults into her machine. She knew exactly what she had to do. Knew she had to harness her anxiety — knew she had to fashion a plan. One that would allow her to make the switch at precisely the right moment. So she could stay forever.

KRIM MARCHED AHEAD OF ABBY DOWN THE LONG CORRIDOR TO THE conference room.

"I hate these damn story meetings," he grumbled, irritation masking his concern. "Corporate suits! Why the hell don't they stick to pushing toilet paper, get creative about that," he said, giving the knot on his tie a final yank.

"It's going to work out perfectly, Krim. For them. And for us."

He stared at her, incredulous. "Too bad you can't take me on this Prozac trip you've been on lately! You think it's an accident they called this meeting for two and drag us in at two-thirty? I'm telling you, they hate it. They hate it as much as I do," he said, knocking on the conference room door.

It opened and they stood face-to-face with Charlie Howell. He did not look happy. Foregoing his usually upbeat "Hi there," he nodded formally. "The rest are already here," said Charlie grimly. Krim took a deep breath then he and Abby walked past him into the room.

For the next hour and a half, Abby meticulously recounted the story they had all read: from Monica's surgery and memory loss, to Troy returning, lovingly nursing her back to health and a new life — a glorious life, she pleaded, with more passion, more resolve than any of them had seen in those cool hazel eyes before. When she finished, the group sat speechless, a bit unnerved by her performance.

"Well …, " said Charlie, "that was certainly compelling. But we do have some concerns … about the ending. Bob …?" he said, throwing the ball to Bob Fury, the sponsor's rep who handled this, as well as A *Golden Dawn*, Howell & Carruthers' sister show.

Fury, a gray Englishman, whose prior claim to fame was a tome on Viking literature and an uncanny ability to talk without committing himself to anything, leaned forward gravely. "Our mission," he said, "is to deliver viewers. In a market hooked on 'talk,' frankly, we question whether your ending will have enough punch for a public fed on … the sex life of lesbian dwarfs, not to mention that O.J. business." He sat back and puffed contentedly on his pipe.

Meg Bartlett, the sassy, young, network V.P., was pacing. "Look, *A Better Day* nabbed an Emmy, got rid of five actors — *and* garnered monster ratings for going to the mat with that location earthquake last year. What we're talking about here is payoff!" she said crisply.

Charlie Howell sat deep in thought, his fingers forming a drumming pyramid in front of him. "I don't have to tell any of you — this next sweeps period is crucial. If we don't improve these numbers dramatically — "

Abby shot up.

"Excuse me, Charlie, but I believe I've found a way. In fact, I can guarantee you the highest ratings this show has ever had," she said, eyes radiating.

All were focused on Abby now. Even Krim, who had been silent throughout the proceedings.

"Meg … what really did it for *A Better Day*?" She took a breath. "Simple! PR hype. We have a good story here." She glanced at Krim who was clenching his right fist below the table. "What we need, what will nail it … is a hook. One that will not only grab the soap mags, but every newspaper, every tabloid show in America!"

"What exactly do you have in mind, Abby?" asked Charlie, his patience straining.

"We go live," she said simply. She watched the confusion register across their faces, one by one, like dominoes in a row. She pressed on, pacing around the room earnestly now.

"A one-shot deal. Friday. Two weeks from now. At the height of sweeps. We open with Monica in surgery, Troy struggling to get back to her. We cut to each of them, scene by scene. We have the viewers on the edge of their seats wondering if our star-crossed lovers will get their chance. And the most compelling hook …? We bring back

soap's heyday with a 'today' twist," she continued, each word jumping alive. "For the first time in 25 years we deliver a real cliff-hanger. Because no one, not even the actors, will know the outcome — but us." She let this sink in. "The PR will be sensational. And so will the pay-off — for all of us," she added, passionately. Perspiration running freely down her face, she slowly returned to her seat.

All sat in stunned silence.

Finally, Charlie spoke. "And the ending? That still remains the same ...?" he pressed, unreadable.

"It has to!" she argued urgently. "Monica recovers and she and — Troy — start over.

"And you won't budge on that score ...?" Meg asked, studying her.

In her mind, Abby saw the words again, flashing dark red now, compelling

ACCESS GRANTED:CONTINUE .

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"I won't — I *can't* write it any other way," she said, stone.

Charlie and Meg exchanged glances as Abby continued. "Charlie, everyone ... you can't write by committee. One point of view. One voice."

Charlie fixed his gaze on Krim. "And how do you stand on this?" he asked, searching.

Krim rose, moved to the coffee machine and refilled his cup. "I stand on the side of the show, " he said carefully, his blue eyes penetrating Charlie's. "We go with one vision. Only one."

Charlie slowly, imperceptively, nodded.

Then turned to Abby. "Then we're all in agreement," he said, fixing his gaze first on Meg, then Krim.

Three pairs of eyes. Locked. Electricity arcing between them.

Abby's were closed now. Choking back her relief, she nodded her thanks.

Bob Fury coughed. "So ... tell us more about this 'live' business, Abby "

"Just give me a minute," she said, summoning her customary efficiency, then rose and disappeared out the door. All looked at each other, perplexed. A moment later she returned, as a round-faced little man with thick glasses and a large briefcase shuffled in after her.

"Everyone, this is Harvey Hirschhorn. Harvey is a consultant I hired — at my own expense," she quickly added. "From HARVELINE INC., a computer firm." She introduced each member of the group, ending with Krim who, burning, covered his surprise and nodded bruskly toward the stranger. Relieved, Abby nodded to Harvey who awkwardly handed out sheets.

"Harvey can supply the details but it's so simple even I, the original computer-phobe, can fill you in on the basics," she said smiling. "I write that script from home as usual but my computer will be connected by modem to a Teleprompter on the set. Harvey has already designed a modem program, LINE LINK — which he's installing in my computer today."

Abby nodded to Harvey. Clearing his throat, he continued.where Abby left off. " ... Your computer monitor will act as your Teleprompter. You move it down to the studio, and basically ... you got a phone line, you're in business. Ms. Greene writes the words — bingo — they appear in the studio." As the group took this in, he beamed, then sat down on the periphery.

Babs Cohn Carson, the show's high-strung line producer, turned to Abby anxiously. "But what about rehearsals, how — "

"No! No rehearsals. No advance scripts. It has to be ... *live*. Or the viewers won't buy it," Abby added quickly. "Our actors are used to cold readings. They can handle it."

All eyes were on Charlie now. He glanced one last time at Meg, then turned decisively to his assistant. "Adam, get hold of Carol Kayfetz and her PR team. If we're going to do this, I want it done right. A media blitz. Now, I suggest we all get moving."

Abby rose, savoring the mixture of joy and relief, and was quickly drawn into animated conversation, filing out with various members of the group.

ONLY CHARLIE, MEG, AND KRIM WERE IN THE ROOM NOW.

Charlie gently closed the door. A band of sweat on his forehead, he began, resigned.

"Krim ... there's a problem with Heather. And the new story line." He glanced at Meg, who nodded. "I assume what you said about the good of the show won't be a problem for you, regardless of any personal 'attachments'? Because Krim, this has to work."

Krim walked to the window. He could almost see Jersey City — somewhere, far behind the majestic skyline. And recalled Abby's words.

" ... of the two of us ... who is going to fix it ...?" Smug. Sure.

He shut the blinds and turned back to them, cold-steel.

"No problem."

THE GROUP IN THE CORRIDOR HAD DISpersed. Abby thanked Harvey, who left to take a quick dinner break before their meeting at her place. Alone now, Abby wondered where Krim was. She started to knock on the conference room door, but the deep, syrupy voice stopped her.

"Abby! So nice to see you." Abby swung around, and stood face-to-face with Heather. "And how is Oliver doing ...?" she clucked. "I adored having the kids over last week. We all just bonded instantly," she purred, her eyes a fountain of compassion. "Anything I can do ... just ask. After all, you did 'create' me, so to speak, so — "

Again, the powerful, now-comforting words swam into view:

ACCESS GRANTED:CONTINUE .

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And Abby burst into laughter.

Startled, Heather stared at her. "When you see Krim, tell him ... I'll catch him at home." Then, as Heather smiled uncertainly, Abby headed jauntily down the corridor.

Alone now, Heather's smile abruptly faded. She lit a cigarette and paced, growing more agitated as the minutes passed. Finally, the door opened and Charlie walked out followed by Krim and Meg, who scurried off to catch the red-eye to L.A.

"Heather. Just the person we wanted to see," said the producer matter-of-factly. "I'm due at a meeting but Krim would like to go over some things with you, if you can stick around — "

"I intend to," she shot. Charlie raised an eyebrow, glanced at Krim, then headed off.

"Christ! I thought they were holding you hostage in there. I've been on a Valium drip ever since you told me about — "

Krim grabbed her into the conference room, locked the door and turned on her, his scar twitching violently. "Dammit! Shut up!"

"Babe, I'm sorry," she said, startled by the violence of his outburst. "Don't worry. You didn't tell me a thing," she cooed, snaking her arms around him.

"Look ... it's just these damn story meetings," he said, moaning, as she unbuttoned his shirt and started to nibble his chest, exactly the way he liked it.

Gently, she pulled away. "Babe ... you were able to get rid of that amnesia crap — and Troy rising from the alligator pit like some damn swamp Phoenix ...? Because that space cadet you married left here higher than a hooker at a political convention."

"You, Harriet Applebaum, are a pain in the ass," he said, grinning as she twitched at the mention of her real name. "But you're definitely worth it."

As his fingers roamed hungrily to her blouse, she firmly removed his hands and looked at him levelly. "Babe, this story Abby's pushing ... bandages ... Pampers for six months? Hell ... I look lousy in white. And as for my starting over with Troy? You know what he 'started' the last time ...? Not that it could ever happen again, but it would be so damn — awkward."

He studied her a moment, his blue eyes flashing ominously. Then suddenly, he hoisted her onto the conference table, arms and legs in

a heated jumble, and grabbed at her with an intensity she had never seen in him before.

"C'mon baby ... tell me," she whispered urgently as he tore aside her panties.

"We'll talk," he grunted hoarsely, undoing his zipper. "After."

BACK IN HER KITCHEN, ABBY LOOKED ON ANXIOUSLY AS HARVEY Hirschhorn finished fiddling at the back of her old computer.

"Okay. Your modem's hooked up," said the computer consultant. "Now to install the program " He pushed up his thick glasses and slipped into her usual place in front of the machine. She watched nervously as he booted it up, deftly popped the disk he created in the drive, then efficiently typed in the commands.

"Harvey, I can't thank you enough," she said rising, impatient now as he methodically started packing up his briefcase.

"You know, I mentioned to my mom — she's 83 — I was doing a job for *A Secret Soul*. Oh — not the details naturally. Thirty years, she's never missed a day. Look, I hate to ask, but could you get me an autographed picture of this Heather Sue Andersen? She's crazy for her." Thrown, Abby looked at him. "But ... if it's too much trouble — "

She smiled. "No. No trouble. I'll send it to you with the check." The little man quickly brightened. "Harve ... you're sure this will work?" she asked for the fifth time.

He sighed. "You connect the modem, you're in business. Look, if you don't mind some advice, I think you take your work a little too seriously. No offense, but it's not Bosnia. Take a break ... get away ... Miami, the Jersey shore. Believe me, you'll live a lot longer." He winked, as she quickly ushered him toward the kitchen door — just as Krim arrived.

"Harve, ol' pal!" said Krim, sarcastically. "Hellova job, today." The computer expert smiled uncertainly, then quickly left as Krim poured himself a drink and stared at Abby.

Slowly, he started applauding. Three distinct claps. "What ... no bow for Little Miss Fixit? That was quite a show, pulling that babbity rabbit — Harvey? out of your magic hat while I sat with my thumb up my ass."

"I had to sell them," she explained levelly. "If I'd told you, we would've argued. And if they saw we were divided on this, it wouldn't have worked — "

"The ol' 'one voice' theory," he shot, downing his scotch and pouring another.

She hesitated. "Look ... thanks for backing me up on that."

He bent in an exaggerated bow. "Anything for the good of the team, right? Of course, I didn't expect you to do a solo out there — without even the usual obligatory bone."

"Look, I know I caught you off guard. I'm sorry about that. But I had no choice." He glared at her bitterly. "So ... what happened after I left?" she asked, quickly diverting.

"Just putting your theory to work darlin.' Did a little 'solo' of my own." He downed his drink with a flourish, then turned unsteadily on his heel and walked out.

Heather's words flashed through Abby's mind ... " ... *anything to help. After all, you did 'create' me "*

Turning back to her machine, Abby started to smile. Then laugh. A rip-roaring laugh ... as she turned on her computer.

THE NEXT FEW WEEKS WERE A BLUR OF FRENZIED ACTIVITY. TRUE TO his word, Charlie Howell kicked off the largest media blitz the world of daytime drama had ever seen. For the first time in its history, *Daytime Digest* put out a special edition devoted exclusively to speculations over "The Fate of Monica." Even the news department ran a segment on *TimeLine*, the network's prime-time magazine show, on the live and impromptu angle, while Frances Pecking of *The Times*, sneered that this was "yet a lower primordial form of plebeian pandering."

And none of it touched Abby.

As the swirl swelled around her, she remained steadfast by her old computer. She never once ventured out, or exchanged more than cryptic information with Krim, who was busy giving interviews and posing for photo shoots. Instead, Abby focused all her energy on delving inside her machine, learning to control the time of her entries and to sustain her "stays," as she called her vaults, for increasingly longer periods of time.

And she worked on believing. Believing hard enough to overcome the small residual anxiety that seemed to trigger her trips back. She did so undeterred, as the kids had moved on to other places, spending virtually all their time with the Robinsons or accompanying Krim and Heather on publicity shoots. Her kitchen became what little remained of her life. Her old life.

It was three days before the big event. All she needed to do was erase the last vestige of anxiety, and when the time came to make the switch ... she would be ready.

Abby booted up the computer and the command emerged easily:

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She eagerly slipped into the drill that was now her lifeblood.

And in a heartbeat she was back.

She opened her eyes slowly and saw Dr. Dan. Once again, Abby felt the ecstasy wash over her.

"How're you feeling, kid?" asked Dr. Dan.

"Better than I have — for a very long time," she said, beaming.

"Given the news about Troy I can't say I blame you. In fact, we just got word he was spotted on a freighter in the Caribbean. He's changed quite a bit. He's sporting a dark beard now, and there's a scar on his cheek ... but he kept talking about getting back to you — to bluebird.' He's very much in love with you, Monica."

Abby closed her eyes, savoring the words she had waited so long to — "

"Well, I think I've tired you out enough," said Dr. Dan.

"No. Actually, I feel like taking a little walk," said Abby, exhilarated.

"You're facing a big operation, kiddo. Sure you're up to it ...?

"Just down the corridor. No Olympics yet, I promise."

As Dr. Dan gently nodded, she met his gaze with just a trace of concern. After he left, she rose carefully and retrieved a robe — her robe from the closet. As she padded into the hospital corridor, she felt the old anxiety start to gnaw at her. Determined to ignore it, she made her way past the rooms, which were shimmering now. She leaned against a wall and steadied herself. She had to fight it, hold on. Suddenly she heard a voice. A voice filled with a caring she hadn't heard since that late September dawn — when she was 12.

"You did everything perfectly."

Shaking, she swung around and moved slowly inside the shimmering doorway. "The fashion show. Perfect," said the large figure in shadow from his hospital bed. "I covered it. Then boom. A heart attack. But it's you I'm worried about," he said, softly.

Hardly breathing now, she approached.

"Here I am, giving advice, and I haven't even introduced myself. Barnett Gruen, the new editor of the Courier. *And if you people here know what you're doing, it looks like I may be around awhile. With you."*

Trembling, her eyes filled as she knelt beside him.

" ... I don't know ... I'm not sure ... I can get the last part right."

Tenderly, he took her small hand in his.

"You can. You can make this come out any way you want, if you believe hard enough," he said gently.

Tears streaming down her face, she looked at their hands, now firmly interlocked and stopped trembling. The last trace of anxiety, gone forever.

"You know you can't stay now. You have to get ready. Do everything you can do. But soon, very soon "

She nodded, unable to speak. Then, his hand still intertwined in hers, she let herself go back. And as the large man slowly melded into a single wall of light before her, she thought she caught an image streak by the window. A tiny bluebird.

"STAY TUNED," PROCLAIMED THE VOICE ON THE PORTABLE TV ON the kitchen counter, "for the biggest event in daytime drama, coming up in — "

"Ten minutes," Abby thought. Her body taut, she wiped the sweat off her hands, then methodically turned to her computer, ignoring

the sound of the blaring promos in the background.

The words MODEM CONNECTED, DIAL, and DISCONNECT appeared on her screen. She chose DIAL — her connection to the studio. She held her breath. Just a few minutes more ….

The familiar theme began, as the montage of faces revolved on the TV screen in sync with the music. They were all there. Dr. Dan, Moira. Bits and pieces of the lives that were Hillview, ending with Monica dancing with Troy. The life that would be hers, as the 30-year-old logo swirled slowly around and steadied. She heard the announcer's practiced voice, "… *A Secret Soul*, brought to you today LIVE … by Howell & Carruthers."

She looked at her screen, and the words swam into view, flashing bold maroon now, embracing her … beckoning …

ACCESS GRANTED:CONTINUE .

ACCESS GRANTED:CONTINUE .

And with a final, joyful smile … Abby began.

From the booth in the studio, Charlie, Bob, and Meg stood watching the actors on the set anxiously buzz around, ready to take their places in view of the rigged Teleprompter.

"We'll be out of commercial in two," said Charlie, his brows deeply furrowed. "This had better work," he murmured.

"It will," said Meg." The veins on Charlie's neck were pulsing, deep purple.

FROM THE KITCHEN, ABBY WROTE FURIOUSLY, the maroon command urging her on … Troy lumbering, Kafka-esque, from one obstacle to another as he neared Hillview; Monica in surgery. From her portable TV, she watched the actors turn in the most stellar performances of their careers, never once faltering, as they read the dialogue cold from the hook-up. Beat by beat.

The kitchen clock read 3:45.

Act 7. The final act. The Recovery Room.

(MONICA, IN BANDAGES, IS HOOKED UP TO MONITORS, AS TROY RUSHES IN, THE SCAR ON HIS CHEEK PULSATING, HIS PIERCING BLUE EYES WILD WITH WORRY)

Abby's fingers flew across the keyboard.

DR. DAN: Troy …!

TROY: How is she …?!

DR. DAN: I'm afraid we had to remove a lot of tissue. There's a good chance Monica won't even know you —

TROY: I don't care! All that matters is we've got a second chance. And I'll do whatever it takes to make sure, this time … we get it right.

(AS THE LARGE MAN ENTERS AND LOOKS ON TENDERLY, TROY SEES MONICA STIR, AND HIS FACE FILLS WITH LOVE)

Abby glanced around the kitchen one last time … at the white and shining chrome. It all seemed out of place now. A "wrong" waiting to be fixed. So things could be made right again. She snapped off the TV. She had done everything she could do. There were no more words. No more dialogue to be written.

Then, after a lifetime of waiting, she suspended all fear and let herself go. Fly free of all the ill-fitting wrongs that had become this woman once known as "Abby." And in that orgasmic moment, as the static roared, merging with the blinding light, she heard the final strains of that old song. Her father's strong sure voice, answering the question, once and for all ….

"Daughter dear, daughter dear, yes, that bluebird of happiness can really be found …."

And she was ripped away.

Abby/Monica looked up from the bed and began to weep with joy as the darkly bearded man with the jagged scar leaned down and gave her the sweetest kiss she had ever known … as the large, tender man held her small hand in his. Everything would be fine now. Perfect.

She was finally home.

THE DIRECTOR LOOKED AT CHARLIE IN THE BOOTH, WHO HESITATED a moment … then slowly nodded.

THEN SHE HEARD IT. AN INCOMPREHENSIBLE SOUND. A HORRIFIC sound, as the machines around her started buzzing wildly.

"Monica …!" shouted Dr. Dan. "Code blue! She's fibrillating!"

Terrified, Abby/Monica saw a horde of men and women in white rush in, surround her, push paddles to her chest.

Frantically her eyes searched for the monitor, the computer hook-up. There were words. More dialogue! But how … ?! how could — "

"She's going into arrest!" yelled another doctor, the words scrolling quickly now.

"C'mon, Monica … c'mon!" said Dr. Dan, working over her feverishly — as the Teleprompter dictated.

Then, with a horror so unspeakable that it knifed through every atom of her being — she saw it.

She screamed, a piteous, reverberating scream. But no one heard. For there were no more words. No more dialogue coming through. Just one final stage direction.

ON MONICA'S LIFELESS BODY. FADE OUT.

And all that was left was a flat line on the monitor.

" … FIVE HUNDRED CALLS SINCE WE WENT OFF THE AIR, AND THE affiliates are reporting the same thing," Charlie Howell was saying to the small group seated with him in the limo.

"To Krim!" said Meg, holding up her champagne glass. "You adding that final dialogue from the studio was a stroke of genius!"

"Smashing!" added Bob. "Charlie gets rid of Heather. We have a marvelous funeral! We cross her over to *A Golden Dawn*, plug the hole for that aging beauty queen, and bring Moira up front to hook in the youthful demographic. "Everyone wins." Krim, Meg, and Charlie happily clinked glasses.

Only Charlie was subdued. "No answer at Abby's," he said, hanging up the car phone as the limo pulled up to the Central Park West co-op.

"She's licking her wounds, but she'll get over it," said Krim as they rode up in the elevator.

"Besides," argued Meg. "What choice did we have? She was obsessed with that ending. We couldn't possibly have told her," she added as Krim turned the key in the lock.

"Abby …?" called Charlie tentatively, as they entered the kitchen.

The sparkling room was empty.

"Moo shu pork," said Krim. "Whenever she's upset, she goes out for moo shoo pork. "She left her computer on," he said, barely glancing at it. "She'll be back any minute."

The executive producer shifted uncomfortably.

"Look Charlie," said Meg. "The 'Soapy's' are coming up. When she gets here, tell her you're sending her to L.A. I'll even get the network to spring for a bungalow at the Beverly Hills Hotel."

"Perfect," said Krim. "I kick off the new 'young' story line with Moira. Abby comes back, rested, tanned, and happy as a lark."

The executive producer still looked dubious.

"When she thinks about it, she'll realize we did her a favor," added Meg.

As they talked, the only noise came from the hum of the old computer on the kitchen table.

"Meg's right," said Krim, moving toward the machine. "Abby's a pro. She knows these things happen all the time. Hell … what are we talking about here? One story line … One story line in a soap opera."

Charlie looked at him for a long moment, then nodded, resigned.

As Krim casually shut off the computer amid the confident assents of the group, he failed to notice the odd command that flashed one last time.

ACCESS:DENIED

Or the tiny solitary figure in shadow in the center of the screen. The tiny lifeless body swathed in bandages.

Fixed forever. ❧



BY TERRI WINDLING

PRE-RAPHAELITES AND THE ROMANTIC TRADITION

The field of modern fantasy illustration can be divided into two distinct traditions. The Heroic school, rooted in the art of the early masters of American illustration, runs from N.C. Wyeth, Howard Pyle and the Brandywine painters through Frank Frazetta to modern Heroic painters like Michael Whelan [cover artist]; while the Romantic school, rooted in the art of 19th century England, runs from the Pre-Raphaelites through Jeffrey Jones to modern Romantic painters like Thomas Canty [pages 40-41] and Robert Gould. In this month's Gallery we look at the second of these traditions, following the historic thread of Romanticism back to the art that has influenced so many of us in the fantasy field: the mythical, mystical, quasi-medieval paintings of the Pre-Raphelites.

The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood began as a rebellion of seven young English artists protesting the confining ideals of High Victorian art — as well as the strict, rote methods of painting they were required to learn and adhere to at London's Royal Academy. They disparaged all Academic art as "slosh" and referred to the head of the Royal Academy, Sir Joshua Reynolds, as "Sir Sloshua". These young men longed to paint as they imagined the early Italian artists (pre-Raphael) had painted: with freedom and simplicity. (For a closer look at the history



LEFT: William Holman Hunt's "Lady of Shalott" is based on Tennyson's Arthurian-based poem. RIGHT: John Everett Millais' "Lorenzo and Isabella," painted in 1849, was the artist's first work painted in the style of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood.

Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford The Ella Gallup Sumner and Mary Catlin Sumner Collection Fund



and stories of the Pre-Raphaelites, see the Folkroots column in this issue.)

Of the seven original members of the PRB, three went on to lasting fame: John Millais, William Holman Hunt and Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Of these, it is Rossetti who we most asssociate with Pre-Raphaelite art today: his paintings of sultry ladies with long white necks and masses of flowing hair have come to define the Pre-Raphaelite style: one rich in romantism, symbolism, mythic imagery, and deep nostalgia for an ideal medieval world that never was. Rossetti, of Italian ancestry, was deeply influenced by the works of Dante, the great Florentine poet who wrote *The Inferno* and *The Divine Comedy*. The legend of Dante's life-long love for Beatrice, married to another man, lay at the core of Rossetti's romanticism, in his art and his life. Rossetti's paintings portray Beatrice and other idealized, mythologized women surrounded by allegorical symbols of Love — love lost, love won, love broken and betrayed.

William Morris and Edward Burne-Jones, both some years younger than their idol, Rossetti, were part of the "second wave" of Pre-Raphaetism. They shared with Rossetti a passion for myths, antiquities, and Arthurian legends, and together they created a world of dreams — not only in paintings and poetry, but in the houses they created for each other, stuffed with medieval fabrics, Japanese screens, and old Dutch pottery, furniture built in medieval style and painted with Romantic themes. Morris created (among many other things) a company to design, build, and market the handcrafted, medievelesque Pre-Raphaelite "look". His wallpapers and fabric designs, although they look quaintly old-fashioned now, captured the flavor of old tapestries in a manner bold, simplified, and modern to the Victorian eye, transforming a high-Victorian decor that was fussy, cluttered and dark.

The young Burne-Jones went on to become a great painter. His pictures have a magical air, infused with myth and golden light, owing as much to Italian Rennaisance



RIGHT: Edward Burne-Jones' "Beguiling of Merlin," finished in 1876, features a portrait of the artist's lover, Maria Zambaco. LEFT: John Everett Millais used Elizabeth Siddal, wife of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, to model as Shakespeare's "Ophelia." LEFT BELOW: "Hope in the Prison of Despair," an allegorical image in the style of Burne-Jones, was painted by Evelyn de Morgan.

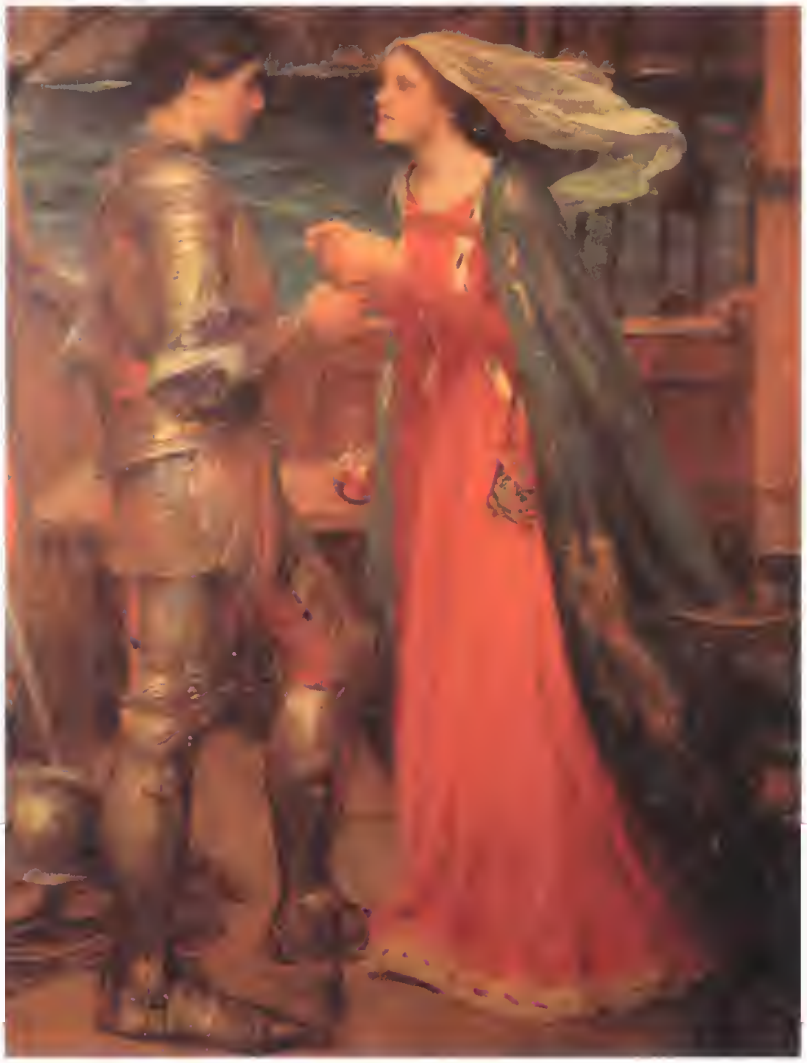
art as to the influence of the PRB. Burne-Jones loved all things Arthurian, from Malory's Morte D'Arthur to the modern poems of Tennyson; he was particularly intrigued by the figure of Merlin, the great magician of Arthur's court.

It was Burne-Jones' work, more than Rossetti's, that was the major influence on the next generation of Pre-Raphaelites — the artists dubbed "The Last Romantics" by art historian John Christian (in the catalog to an extensive show mounted in 1985 at London's Barbicon Gallery.) Rather than coming from a single London circle, like the PRB, the artists who fall under this heading came from several different schools and parts of the British Isles. In Birmingham (Burne-Jones' native city), the movement called "Arts & Crafts" brought Romantic imagery to ceramics, jewelry, stained glass work, metal-work and book design as well as to canvas. In Scotland, too, a distinct Pre-Raphaelite influence ran through the Arts & Crafts movement in the paintings of the Celtic mystic John Duncan, the decorative work of Margaret Macdonald and her husband, Charles Rennie Macintosh, the murals of Phoebe Traquair and others in the "Celtic Revival". In London, the romantic and artistic partnership of Charles Ricketts and Charles Shannon produced Vale Press, specializing in gorgeously illustrated hand-pressed books influenced by Morris's Kelmscott Press. The work of the talented, perverse Aubrey Beardsley, on that other hand, satirized the Kelmscott editions (particularly Beardsley's "Morte D'Arthur"), albeit in gorgeous Romantic style often mistaken for genuine Pre-Raphaelitism.

Although the PRB had begun in reaction against the Royal Academy, over time Millais, Burne-Jones and others joined that prestigious establishment, which then fostered a number of second and third generation Romantic artists. The very best of these was John William Waterhouse, the son of a minor English painter who'd spent his early years in Italy. His large, bold paintings combined the influence of Pre-Raphaelite art with an almost Impressionistic use of color, light, and bold strokes of the brush. Waterhouse's numerous paintings — inspired by Greek myth, Shakespeare and other narrative imagery — stand alongside the work of Burne-Jones for sheer painterly quality, and his art continues to exert an important influence over fantasy illustration today.



Although it is popularly believed that women existed in Pre-Raphaelite circles as silent Muses, famed only for their long flowing hair, in fact the women of the circle were active, vocal, and artists themselves. Elizabeth Siddal was a watercolorist, Jane Morris and Georgiana Burne-Jones were highly skilled at embroidery and other so-called "women's arts" — working long hours side-by-side with the men to create the distinctive Pre-Raphaelite "look". With the second and third waves of Pre-Raphaelitism we see an increasing number of women in leading art schools and galleries: women like Evelyn de Morgan, wife of the potter William de Morgan and an important symbolist painter of her day; Maria Spartali Stillman, who gained her skills in the studio of Ford Maddox Brown; Kate Bunce, a leading Birmingham painter and one of the founders of the City Art Gallery; tempera painter Marianne Stokes who favoured scenes from medieval





romance; muralist Dorothy Webster Hawksley; the illustrators Margaret Tarrant, Florence Harrison and Jessie M. King; and many others — particularly in the Arts & Crafts movement that valued crafts often trivialized as "women's work".

Despite the fact that these third wave Pre-Raphaelites are called the "Last" Romantics, and despite changing fashions which relegated PRB paintings to musty attics for several decades, a revival of interest in the Pre-Raphaelites in the middle of the 1960s not only brought older works back into public view but also fostered a new Romanticsm in the work of modern young artists. In the '70s, a group of English artists emerged who openly acknowledged a strong PRB influence — both in their Romantic, enigmatic art, and in their interconnected lives. This acclaimed group of seven artists, called The Brotherhood of Ruralists, includes the painters Ann Arnold, Graham Arnold, Peter Blake, David Inshaw, Annie Ovendon, Graham Ovendon, and sculptor Jann Haworth. Other artists working today that are indebted in varying degrees to the PRB include Patrick Woodruff, Alan Lee and Brian Froud in England. American artists with a distinctly PRB infuence include Barry Windsor-Smith, Jeffery Jones, Michael Kaluta, Jon J. Muth and Charles Vess.

To learn more about Pre-Raphaelite Art and the men and women behind it, I recommend seeking out the following books. The best art book to date is Christopher Wood's *The Pre-Raphaelites*, which combines an informative text with an abundance of reproductions in full color. Jan Marsh's *Pre-Raphaelite Women* is another handsome picture book. To learn more about the later, I recommend Marsh's study of the group, The Pre-Raphaelite Sisterhood, and Jude Burkhauser's *Glasgow Girls* about the women of the Scottish Arts & Crafts movement.) Anthony Hobson's *The Art and Life of J.W. Waterhouse* is the best book available about this extraordinary painter. For Burne-Jones and Rossetti, one has quite a number of good books to chose from — although I particularly like the new Abbeville Press editions for their long, tall formats and rich reproductions.

Those seven young men who defied the Victorian art Establishment over one hundred years ago have left us a wondrous legacy, a rich aesthetic, blending nature's beauty with myth, mysticism and high romance. Many of us find this aesthetic as compelling now during our Technological Revolution as it was during their Industrial



Revolution — and perhaps for the many of the same reasons.

"For every locomotive they built," Edward Burne-Jones once said, "I shall paint another angel." Although the world is still far from the idealized medieval craft society William Morris dreamed of, and although he would surely find much to be appalled about in the aesthetics of our time, I'm sure Morris would be pleased indeed to know that some of us still live with his fabric, his chairs, his wallpaper designs, with framed reproductions of art by his friends. I'm sure Morris and his circle would be pleased to know we're still painting angels. ❧

ABOVE: Rossetti's "La Pia de'Tolomei" is taken from Dante's Purgatory *and features a portrait of Jane Morris. LEFT: J. W. Waterhouse painted "Tristram and Isolde" in 1916, shortly before his death. The image depicts the forlorn Arthurian lovers on the ship that is taking Isolde to her wedding with Tristram's uncle, King Mark of Cornwall.*


FLEMING
97

This story should not be read by children ages six to eight, you'll see why...

teeth

BY DAVID PHALEN *Illustration by Thomas Fleming*

When I blow in with the breeze through a small crack along the window frame, Peaseblossom is perched on the plain wooden headboard of a child's bed, sprinkling sleepdust into the face of a six-year old.

Peasie doesn't see me. Bad news for her. I arc toward her, the sharpened edges of the star on my fairystick angled for quick, silent attack. But the moon coming through the slats of the mini-blinds flashes on the 'stick's white enamel, sending a warning beacon. Peasie spots it and shoots straight up.

Twisting nearly out of control, I clip her before she slips out of range. The slice is clean; the bottom half of her left wing waves uselessly in her retreat, in the way old cobwebs move to mysterious currents up in corners near the ceiling.

I scrape against the rough stucco finish of the bedroom wall. It burns like hell. By the time I regain control, Peasie is hovering over the foot of the bed, fire in her eyes.

"Mine!" she hisses. She charges straight at me, a move so insanely stupid that I fall for it. I hover in a defensive stance, ready to knock her teeth in. At the last second, she veers sharply up and away from me, emptying the contents of her 'dust bag just before she passes. Angular momentum sends the cloud straight toward my face.

I turn a double roll, sneezing thrice to discharge the few stray parti-

cles I inhale. My eyelids feel heavy. A close call.

The biggest bomb in her arsenal gone, Peasie hangs back warily. I close the distance between us, then start circling to make the most of my mobility advantage. When her sleepdust doesn't slow me down, Peasie starts looking for an exit.

"This block is ours," she says desperately.

I give her my most chilling smile. "Was," I tell her, my eyes narrowing. I move just high enough to make the window look attractive. Peasie goes for it.

She never comes close. I'm in an instant power dive. At the last second, she tries to fend me off with her fairystick, but the gesture is worse than useless. Weight and speed take me into her so hard that we both go sprawling to the carpeted floor. Her 'stick spins out of her hand, across the room.

I'm up before she is. In a show of contempt, I walk over to where she struggles to rise. Her right wing flaps frantically; her left wing is a torn, useless mess. She tries to crawl, but when she realizes escape is impossible, she turns and waits.

"Please?" she pleads as I stand over her. The begging is worth the scraped skin it cost me. I nod and smile.

I've often thought the shiver humans get when someone runs fingernails along a blackboard is a sort of communal recognition of fairy screams. Using the star of my 'stick, I slice off Peasie's perfect toes, inadvertently splitting her hand down the middle when she puts it up to block me. Dazed from the suddenness of my act, she barely struggles when I kick her over onto her stomach and go to work on her good wing. I don't simply slice through it in the painless way I destroyed her other one. This time I take out a hunk of skin around the wing blade and pop the tendons loose with the straight end of my 'stick. I snip the points of her ears next, leaving her with ugly, rounded stumps like those of the child in the bed, who's oblivious to nightmare screams that should make the dead cringe.

I make a mental note to tell Oberon about the strength of the sleepdust Titty's gang is using.

Peasie's screams have become pathetic little mewling noises. I'm sick of her. I lift my 'stick over my head and chop through her neck. Blood pumping from her jugular splatters one of my wings. It feels tacky, but I'll wear it proudly until I go home.

I lift Peasie's headless body by its crumpled remaining wing and carry it up to the child's bed. Beneath the bleachy-smelling pillow I find what I came for—smooth, hard, cool to the touch. Tradition calls for dimes or quarters. I like the poetry of leaving Peasie instead.

Tooth in my pouch, I grab Peasie's head by its hair as I fly by. A nail working its way loose of the outside window frame makes as good a pike as any, so I slam the head onto it.

Peaseblossom's smiling face should let Titania's gang know I've moved onto this block.

ON THE FLIGHT TO OBERON, I REVEL IN THE SIGHTS AND SOUNDS and smells of the city. Thirty years ago—before I was born—the streets I fly through didn't even exist. My parents lived in the woods outside the small town which is now this small city. When the humans built an automotive plant, a couple of satellite industries followed. As the town grew, the woods got smaller. Old-timers like my parents bitch about the loss of our sweet, pastoral roots, but this has been the way with humans and fairies for a thousand years. We ought to be used to it by now.

I love the city. I love the golden glow of streetlights never hidden by clouds. I love the sibilant whispers of human cars driving through darkened streets. I love the way acrid human fumes crawl right inside my head to give me a buzz. Mostly, I love all the people, because people mean teeth; and teeth are where the magic is.

Oberon is always happy to see me, maybe for the teeth I bring, maybe for the stories I tell about how I got them.

"Puck!" he shouts when I fly into his fern glade in a neighborhood arboretum. "Where has this night taken you?"

He nods appreciatively when I empty my tooth pouch and laughs at the appropriate points of my story of the fight with Peaseblossom. He shows concern, though, when I mention the strength of her sleepdust.

"Titty's been gathering nightshade," he says. "Is, perhaps, she working on something more permanent than sleep?" He smiles at me. "Time for some experiments of my own."

He puts a hand on my shoulder and walks me toward the corner of the glade he uses to work on magic more powerful than the pitiful tricks our parents content themselves with. The setting moon lengthens the striped shadows of the fern fronds, tattooing a pattern across the thoughtful look on Oberon's face. "Have you time for one more task tonight, or are your folks waiting up?"

I frown at the taunt, but he waves it off with a slight smile. He's checking to see if the buttons he has on me still work. "Across the valley, next to Leaning Rock, I saw nightshade two evenings past. If it yet remains, bring it to me. As you return, pass by Jagged Stump and gather some of the toadstools that sprout from its roots through the late dew."

He talks like that sometimes. I usually do what he says, anyway, because he has a lot more patience for the magic side of things than I do.

BY THE TIME I FINISH OBERON'S ERRANDS, IT'S AN HOUR PAST DAWN. Mother and Father are waiting up for me in our tree in the woods just north of town.

"You're late, Robin." I hate when Mother calls me by my name, which is probably why she does it so often.

"Lost track of time."

Father looks at me sternly. "Were you out with Ronnie?"

"I saw Oberon a couple of times, but most of the night I was alone," I answer truthfully, emphasizing the preferred name, though it won't make a difference. It never has.

"What were you doing?" Mother asks. They gang up to keep me off balance.

"I was just out," I say, but they know where I've been.

Father takes a deep breath. "Teeth," he says.

"So!" Parents make it hard to keep cool.

Father shakes his head in preparation for his standard spiel. "Do you know why teeth are important to fairies?" he asks, as if this is news to anyone over the age of three. I slouch down and look at the branch, resigned to listening to an old story once again.

"Before humans became sick with the need for order and rational thought," my father begins, "they lived as equals with fairies, giving us their fondest dreams so we could work magic from them. For fairy magic is the magic of dreams."

"Can we do the condensed version this time?" I ask, but my father ignores me.

"When the sickness for order took over the human mind, it left little room for dreams. Without dreams to feed it, fairy magic grew weak, so we struck an orderly, rational deal with humans to assure our survival.

"Human children still dream, but when they grow, rationality comes, pushing their dreams out of their heads to make room for the rational insanity they crave. While humans fear change, they understand exchange; so to keep our magic alive, fairies purchase the dream-teeth of human children, in accordance with a deal made a thousand years ago."

"These aren't the old days, Dad," I tell him.

"When a fairy makes a deal, it does not change with the times." My father always talks like that, which is the main reason I never do anything he asks me to.

"You weren't stealing teeth, were you, dear?" Mother asks. I'd like to think she's worried about me, but more than likely she just doesn't want her friends to think of her as the mother of the fairy who broke some thousand-year old deal.

"I left something," I tell her, feeling no desire to elaborate. "Can I go to bed now?"

Father speaks in a low, sad voice. "Tell Ronnie to be careful. Magic is not a game fairylings."

"We're not fairylings!" I shout.

He nods as if he understands, but he fights back a smile.

"Then act like adults," he says in a tone of dismissal.

On my bedbranch, I throw myself onto my dandelion-stuffed mattress, but I'm too mad to sleep.

I ACCIDENTALLY FLY INTO THE WRONG ROOM THE NEXT NIGHT. Human adults are noisy, stinking sleepers, snoring loudly and letting out gusts of their reeking breath every few seconds. Scared shitless, I try to back out the knothole I came through, but the breeze I'm riding pushes too hard for reversals. I spin away from it, slamming into the window frame in my panic.

The strength of my fear, more than anything, puts the idea into my head. Adult humans hold such power over us with only the vaguest acknowledgement that we even exist. Over the years, they have confined us to a realm of half-myth that allows them to tear apart our world. We take it as a fact of life, but sitting in that reeking room, trying to catch enough breath to make my escape, I wonder about the source of human power. If fairy magic comes from the dreams of human children, how much more powerful must be the magic they are holding back from us, the adult human dreams that ignore us into near extinction.

I take three deep breaths and coast low along the wall toward the bed with the sleeping adult forms. When someone's breathing hitches away from its regular rhythm, I almost turn and flee. When the sound returns to normal, I continue.

This close to them, I have to breathe into the crook of my arm to keep from passing out. They are far uglier than their children, who never struck me as great beauties. The woman lies on her stomach, her pot-holed face scrunched against the pillow, her mouth cracked open and leaking a string of spit. The man is on his back, all of his hideous face clearly exposed for the world to see. Between his mouth and his nose he has a patch of dark, bristly hair, some evil growth spreading along his cheeks, chin, and neck. He growls deep breaths through his wide mouth.

His mouth.

Beyond his cracked, flaking, dead-fish lips are the largest teeth I have ever seen. Swimming in slimy pink gums, they are the teeth of legends: enormous things, long, smooth, shining white in the wonderful light of the night. I want to bow my head in their presence, worship their rough enamel edges. I am drawn forward to touch them, but forced back when he expels a breath.

I must have one. I know this as soon as I see them, know these wonderful, gargantuan icons are a source of power far beyond the crude tinkering of even the darkest fairy magic. The power to be ground from teeth such as these is the nightmare force wielded by the fairies of old: the power to shape and control and destroy.

I hover just beyond his breathing range and plan how I will get this power. In my pouch, I have some of the new-formula sleepdust Oberon has given me to test. It is as powerful, he says, as such dust can be made. I smile at the boast, thinking of what he might do with the teeth I see before me.

Still, the dust should be useful. I hover in close, testing the timing of those long, steady breaths. A rush of air stinging my eyes, I dive down, emptying half my pouch as he breathes in. He gags a bit, but then his breathing is steady, deeper than before. The woman is a simpler matter of a sprinkle on the pillow before her face. The small, dark hairs sticking from her nostrils will not be a fine enough screen to filter out my dust.

While they breathe deeply of my magic, I tear off a small strip of their bedsheet and tie it around my mouth and nose. Its flowery smell is cloying, artificial, but it will be much better than trying to work with the stench of the man's breath in my nose. By the time I am ready, the two are well asleep.

Human gums are soft, easy to slice with the sharpened star of a fairystick. As with most soft things, though, they are also sensitive. I have barely begun my work when the man's face twitches with pain he must think a dream. His lips close, threatening to trap me if I am not careful. I sprinkle more dust down his throat, but this makes him cough, shooting me nearly to the ceiling. I try a new approach and sprinkle the dust directly onto the gums. It flashes and sizzles when it hits the blood already flowing through his mouth, but it calms his involuntary twitches.

I get down to the serious business of extracting a tooth in love with its home. I slice and dig extensively before I finally find the upper end of the root's outline. The work is bloody and exhausting. Once I've cleared the gum from around the roots, I expect the tooth to just pop out when I pull, but it sticks. When I jump up and down on it, it barely moves.

I cut and dig some more, working my way up into the head, prying with my 'stick against the teeth surrounding the one I have chosen, feeling it loosen, and straining all the harder with every new wiggle I create. Each time I jump on it, the tooth gives a bit more, but something still holds it, pushes against my small gains. Finally, I try it from beneath, fluttering halfway down his throat for room to work up speed. I fly into the tooth hard, hitting it with nearly enough force to pop my shoulder from its socket.

A final gush of human blood washes over me as the tooth shoots clear of the man's mouth. He lets out a low groan, while the tooth describes a slow arc and lands on the woman's cheek. It slides off, leaving a dark streak past the corner of her mouth and down her chin.

Her eyelids flutter open. "Say something?" she asks the man; but he is snoring again, so she closes her eyes.

I move down to claim my prize. From tip to tip, the tooth is more than half as big as I am. I can stuff two, sometimes three children's teeth into my pouch, but this one will never fit. Loosening a strap, I make an impromptu sling.

Initial lift is a strain, but once I am in the air, I can handle the load. I float to the window, but I have to land again because I can't squeeze myself through the knothole while carrying the tooth. I unstrap it, force it through the hole in front of me, then strap it on again when I get outside. The last sound I hear from the adult human room is another groan from the man. The sleepdust is beginning to wear off.

THE COOL, FRESH NIGHT AIR FILLS ME WITH STRENGTH. I LEAP from the window sill, dipping only slightly before my wings catch enough air to lift me. I am anxious to get to Oberon, to show him the tooth, tell him of my theory, and see what magic he can create.

I head directly toward the arboretum. Titty's gang is the last thing on my mind until I spot them only a couple of blocks into my flight. Three of them make a half-hearted effort to keep hidden in the thin branches of a hedge. The largest one is Cobweb, so the other two must be Moth and Mustardseed.

If I make an obvious run for it, they will be on me in seconds unless I drop my prize. My best chance is to act unalarmed until I come to a place to make a break, so I steer slightly away from the hedge, letting them trail me. I don't dare risk another look back, but I feel them closing in.

I have three options. Straight ahead is a small corner of a wooded area I could follow back to my parent's tree. To the left is another human yard, sprinkled with a few sickly plants. To the right is an open lot with tall grass, bleached smooth by the moon's light.

The trio behind me will expect a move into the woods, where they can use the increased cover to circle around and come at me from several sides at once. Instead, when I reach the end of the hedge row, I put on a burst of speed and veer right at a sharp angle. I hear squeals of surprise, followed by a couple of crisply barked orders. They are confident that I can't escape them through the open area where I have chosen to fly.

Of course, the area is not as open as it seems. I dive low, using tall grass and leafy weeds to screen me from sight. Someone tries to follow, cursing through unexpected interference. Cobweb will soon realize that the way to spot me is to hover high and look for movement below. With their superior numbers, I won't be able to dodge them for long.

Instead of running, though, I look for a place to lie low. I spot a small ditch, leveled out from above by a clump of cowslip. I land,

breathing through my mouth and hoping one of them doesn't stumble over me in a clumsy search. I hear the whispered fluttering of someone's wings from the left, but the sound fades. When its last hint has drifted away, I unstrap the tooth and begin to dig.

Using the fairystick is too dangerous in the flashing moonlight, so I rely on fingers, pulling up grass and clumps of root and soil by the handfuls. I work quickly, but the hole must be large enough and deep enough to cover the tooth completely. By the time I am finished, I can hear the others moving around me in a systematic search.

As I arrange flattened grass to cover the hiding spot, an excited shout goes up. I freeze, certain I have been spotted. The startled squeal of a field mouse seconds later shows it to be a case of mistaken identity. I mark my spot by shaping the last couple of concealing clumps into an almost indiscernible X.

I must move before they find me. They will likely suspect nothing, but if they get curious, I want them looking far away for clues. I crawl to the edge of the cowslip. Without the weight of the tooth, I stand a good chance of escape if I don't fly right into one of them. They are quiet, which might mean they have given up and left. More likely, all three are hovering overhead, waiting for my move. I hope for spacing foolish enough to allow me room for escape.

I come up fast. Mustardseed is closest, less than twenty feet away. When I veer from her, I spot the other two, angling in from positions between me and the woods.

Since I'm already cut off, I do something unexpected. I reverse direction, dropping low again in the hope that I can get past Mustardseed. She reacts well, though, diving to cut me off. My fairystick held out, I try to bluff her into enough of a flinch to let me by. She stands her ground, ducking under my swing and grabbing my legs as I fly past.

We cartwheel through the air, out of control. We scrape over the grass-tops and come up hard against the smooth side of a rock jutting from the ground. Mustardseed hits first, cushioning the blow for me. She lets out a surprised "Peep!" before we fall to the ground. When I stumble to my feet, she doesn't try to stop me.

The other two are on me before I can take off, though. Moth grabs my arms from behind, pushing my wings against my back. Cobweb stands in front of me, a vicious, stupid smile on her face.

"What brings you to our neck of the woods?" she asks.

"We're not in the woods, asshole," I tell her. She kicks me in the balls. Moth giggles in my ear.

"Any other smart things you want to say?" Cobweb asks.

"I'll take over," says a voice sweet as honey. Titania floats down and lands next to Cobweb. If I had any breath left, one look at her would take it away. Her gown shimmers silver. The fiery red of her hair sparkles dew-like in the glow from a streetlight a half a block away. Full lips smile invitingly.

"How are you, Puck?"

Even if I could think of a response, I couldn't get it out through the pain of Cobweb's shot to my nuts.

"I asked a question," Titania says, her voice like distant, tinkling bells. "It's rude not to answer." She slams an open palm into my nose. I smell the gush of my own blood.

I don't remember anything she says after that, but I remember most of the blows she uses to work me over. She boxes my ears and blackens my eyes, slamming a knee into my groin whenever she is disappointed by my lack of reaction. Elbow smashes to the ribs snap things inside of me. Fairystick chops to the shins send messages of agony intense enough to cut through all the other pain. When Moth stops holding me, I don't have the strength to stand on my own. I slump to the ground, only vaguely aware of Titania's kicks to my body.

She lets up for awhile. After a brief gray period, the shape of her face—pale, unbelievably lovely—swims into focus above me. I can't decipher her words, but there is no mistaking her sweet, murderous smile. Finally, she holds up her 'stick and says, "Peasie."

I realize what is coming next. The four of them stand in a semicircle, waiting for me to show fear. I try to spit at them. Slimy, heavy blood dribbles down my chin.

Titania laughs, touching the cool, rough edge of her star to my neck. "I'm going to enjoy this," she says. She lifts the 'stick above her head. Golden flecks of light glitter in her black, black eyes. I tell myself I won't flinch, but when her arms start forward, I cringe anyway. I close my eyes, the muscles in my neck bracing for the blow.

Nothing happens.

When I look again, Titania still stands over me. Surprise and confusion have replaced her smirk. Moth and Mustardseed and Cobweb are looking behind her.

"What is the meaning of this?" says a deep, stern voice. Titania turns toward the sound, but I don't need to look to know who it is.

"Your parents have not taught you this," says my father.

I experience a moment of pride and embarrassment and satisfaction all rolled into one. Titania's gang has no better idea of how to react to my father than I do.

"Go to your trees. Tell your parents I will come to see them."

The last thought I have before everything goes black is amazement that they do what he says.

I WAKE UP HERE, THOUGH NO ONE HAS TOLD ME EXACTLY WHERE "here" is, yet. Things are different. Instead of the glow of streetlights at night, I see only the cold, silver points of thousands of stars. The soothing whisper of cars has been replaced by the sudden, sharp questions of owls. The odor of pines, as overpowering as the city's fumes, provides no buzz. Wherever my parents have brought me, it is far from my own turf.

"You're here to get better, Robin," Mother tells me whenever I question her.

"Away from bad influences," Father likes to add.

I spend most of my time lying on a bedbranch, my wounds slowly healing. Doctors come to check on me periodically, changing bandages and probing the internal damage with skilled fingers. Counselors also come to see me, probing the contents of my head in ways far less skilled than the physicians'. I've decided the best way to get out is to lie low and do whatever they ask.

The others here are like me, I guess. Every evening, just after sunset, two orderlies help me down to a ring of rocks in a clearing. There is something magical about the ring; once inside, we can't leave unless escorted. I have tried only covert probing with feet and elbows, but others have crashed against it so viciously they had to be restrained and taken away.

We come to the ring for group sessions, where I have to sit and listen to the others complain about their stupid lives. They talk about the things they've done as if they were mistakes; and I suppose if I were as idiotic as they are, I might not want to take credit for my past, either. A boy with a shaved head likes to go into detail about the sexual acts he's performed to be included in different gangs. A perfectly normal-looking girl tells the story of how she tried to fly into a lawn mower when her parents wouldn't let her take part in some May Day festival. The "group leaders"—counselors who are supposed to be young, but who use language ten years out of date—encourage us to "share and care." Pretty pathetic.

They want me to share what I've been through, but so far I've held back. I'm not ashamed of what I've done, but pride won't be welcome here. Still, once my wounds have healed, I'll have to speak up. They expect confession and remorse, so I'll give it to them in order to get out of here.

Mother and Father say we aren't going back to the city. They tell me we'll live in these woods, still a couple of generations from human encroachment by their estimate. They think the forest will have some kind of magic healing effect on me, that pine trees and owls will make me into their ideal fairy son. They say there's nothing in the city for us.

Maybe there's nothing for them, but as soon as I'm better, I'll find a way past the pathetic circle magic of nature and go back home. The prize I buried should still be there, and there are plenty more where that came from. Thousand-year old deals and fluttering through forests may be enough for my mother and father, but I have my sights on something bigger.

Something I can only find in the city.

Something with teeth. ❧



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BY MARK SUMNER

New World Computing provides solid strategy in a medieval world.

HEROES ARE A MIXED BLESSING. IF YOU'RE BEING THREATENED WITH IMMEDIATE DEATH, then it's certainly nice to have a hero step in and thwart the aim of your attacker. But in ordinary life, heroes can be a pain. Gilgamesh doesn't sound like a very pleasant fellow to have as a neighbor, Samson was certainly a pain to both friends and family, Arthur was no bundle of laughs, and I think everyone has long suspected that Superman has a depressing effect on property values in Metropolis. Fortunately for the heroes — and unfortunately for the poor folk of the countryside — New World Computing's *Heroes of Might and Magic II: The Succession Wars* is set in a time when feats of strength and daring do are in great demand. Warfare ranges over the countryside, dragons fly overhead, giants smash their opponents, and the undead walk the Earth. Obviously you need heroes to keep all these beasties in line.

In the world of *Might and Magic*, you begin your adventure by choosing from one of six types of heroes — Knight, Sorceress, Barbarian, Warlock, Necromancer, and the Wizard. Each of these types can recruit and command a specific set of followers, each of which has its own advantages and disadvantages. As a young and struggling hero, you'll have only a single town and little cash. With such picayune holdings, you'll find it possible to recruit only the weakest of the available men and creatures to your cause. So what is a hero to do if he wants to rise to truly heroic status?

In Heroes of Might and Magic *you must go forth and conquer to become a true hero.*



Why, go forth and conquer! As you move your small band around the map, you will immediately discover encounters waiting in the plains, forests, and mountains. Magic spells lie abandoned among ancient ruins. Wild creatures will seek your death. Other, more friendly, wanderers may seek to join your crew. Valuable mines lie waiting for discovery, as do various sorts of magical items which can be distributed to improve the abilities of your troops. Using your meager resources, you must spread out, taking control of towns and mines, and using the funds these sites generate to build new fortified castles. The more area that falls within your domain, the easier you'll find it to recruit and pay high-powered creatures. Other heroes will also join your cause. With these new heroes to command troops of their own, you can separate your army into pieces and begin to really grab some turf.

Eventually, of course, you will begin to encounter the troops commanded by other leaders. These blackguards will seek to take your towns, mines, and mills for their own. Only a good stiff thrashing from your own troops can keep them at bay — heroes don't practice diplomacy. The combat system is simply, but effective. Bands of creatures and their commanding heroes face off in a duel. Depending on the types of troops, this may involve direct hand to hand combat, volleys of arrows or other missiles, aerial assault from flying beasts, or magical combat. There's a smidgen of randomness in these battles, and a modicum of skill, but by far the largest factor in determining the outcome of each battle involves simply bringing the most force to the fight. Getting there "fustest with the mostest" is what counts in *Heroes II*.

Those who have played *Heroes I* will find most of their tried and true magic still in place. But if you acquire the funds and ability to upgrade the mage's guilds in you castles, you'll find that some interesting, and powerful, new spells are waiting to be discovered. There are also some shrouded, mysterious sites in the countryside which can hold powerful spells. But these sites are usually guarded by powerful protectors, so nabbing these spells is no easy task. As in the first version, there is a good cast of creatures available to each type of hero. Knights recruit mostly human figures, ranging from lowly peasants to impressive paladins. The new necro-

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mancer character gathers an undead army that includes everything from vampires to mummies, to bone dragons. One of the things that makes these creatures stand out from those in other games is the fact that they are not balanced. No other creature has the overall power of the warlock's black dragon. But producing a black dragon takes a lot of time and money. Is one incredibly powerful dragon really a match for a whole field of halfling slingers?

There are enough variations in creatures and costs that calculating the outcome of a battle can be a lot tougher than it first appears. Following the layout of games such as *Warcraft*, *Heroes of Might and Magic II* boasts a two-forked storyline with a long campaign separated into a series of scenarios. The battles and tasks set forth in each episode can be quite lengthy, but the campaign itself is simple. The names of the two forks — Good and Evil — are all you need to know.

Should you find your way through the campaign, you'll find that *Heroes II* provides a very complete scenario. Unlike such editors in many games, the player is given the ability to create scenarios every bit as complete and as complicated as those used in the prebuilt campaign. I would expect to see a number of these scenarios bouncing around the Internet very soon. Speaking of the Internet, New World Computing has provided this game with a feature that I'd love to see become commonplace. With a single click, the software will check New World's web site, determine if you have downloaded the latest version, automatically download the needed files, and update your version of the game. This makes installing the latest patches and installs an almost painless process.

While *Heroes of Might and Magic II* might not provide a complex, involving storyline, it does provide solid, well-balanced gameplay. The variety of heroes and the creatures they command keeps the game interesting. And where the earlier version of *Heroes* was a little lacking in the area of graphics and overall design, *Heroes II* has been upgraded on all fronts. This is one sequel that shows a company really can listen to the demands of its users and put in the effort required to make things right. Strategy gamers have found themselves laboring under a embarrassing wealth of riches over recent months, with one wonderful game after another reaching the stands, but few of these can match up to *Heroes of Might and Magic II*.

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Strategy among the savages with KKND

Nuclear war doesn't sound like a good time, but people always seem to find keen ways to amuse themselves in the aftermath. Ever wished that the *Mad Max* movies were a participatory event? Want to run insanely fast vehicles packed with weird weapons across a post-apocalyptic landscape? Then *KKND — Krush Kill 'N Destroy* — is your kind of entertainment.

Following the Big Bang, one group of human beings has retreated underground. They've protected their genetic material from the microwave oven of the surface, but at the cost of incredible hardship and a government somewhere to the right of Atilla the Hun.

Facing off with these guys are a group calling themselves The Evolved. These folks



remained above ground, living in more spacious surrounding while picking up a few extra bends and kinks in their DNA structure. A few generations of battling big bad mutant critters has left them with a definite anti-scientific attitude, and a penchant for shoving a spear down the throat of casual visitors.

When the survivors climb out of their hole to claim their place in the sun, you just know these guys are going to fight. Gameplay in *KKND* follows closely the design established by strategy winners like *Warcraft* and *Command & Conquer*. You get the same three quarters perspective and a very similar layout of cities. But the high-resolution terrain provides a distinctive flavor, with the tops of ruined skyscrapers and monuments jutting from the blasted soil, and stretches of cracked and crumbling highways still peeking though desert sands. The visuals of *KKND* definitely set it apart.

The AI of the game is smart — irritatingly smart. You won't find the guys on either side easy to ambush. In fact, you may find them waiting in ambush for you if you get careless. And units learn with time, so the more often they evade your attack, the tougher it is to get them the next time. You'll find they have more brains than your average orc.

KKND is sold in this country by Electronic Arts, and there are plenty of U. S. settings in the game, but the program originates with Beam Software from Australia. Somehow, this program feels Australian. Somehow I'd not be surprised to see Max himself piloting these little engine of war. ❧

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BOOKS

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devil: if Dracula (also known as Vlad Tsepesh) could corrupt the eldest son of each Tsepesh generation, the devil would allow him to continue to live.

In the first book, Dracula faces his greatest problem with Arkady, the eldest son of the current Tsepesh generation, who is a good man and will not be corrupted. If he dies before his soul is corrupted, Dracula's pact with the devil will be broken, and Dracula will die. We left Arkady at the end of the first book near death. Unable to corrupt him, Dracula takes a desperate step. He bites Arkady, transforming him into a vampire. Arkady has not been corrupted, but he has been trapped between life and death, so technically Dracula has not failed. He has bought himself time to corrupt Arkady's son, Stefan.

Arkady is a fascinating character. A devoted husband and father, haunted by the sins of his family, he now finds himself to be the same type of monster as the one he so despises. Only by embracing the vampire life and learning its secrets can he grow strong enough to one day defeat Dracula. We see him torn between the bloodlust of vampirism, the bitterness that drives his desire for revenge, and the love for his family.

Mary, Arkady's wife, believes he is dead and marries another man, Jan Van Helsing. After some years Jan dies, leaving Mary with two sons now in their twenties: Stefan, Arkady's son, and Abraham, an adopted son. When Stefan is kidnapped by one of Dracula's minions, Arkady rescues him and explains Stefan's heritage to him, warning him of Dracula's intentions. But Dracula will not be stopped and soon kidnaps Stefan successfully. Arkady tells Abraham it is now up to him to rescue his brother and kill Dracula. The vampire can only be killed by the hand of a human.

In the tradition of Dracula, this is a story of forbidden passions. Stefan is in love with Abraham's wife, which drives a wedge between the two brothers. And Arkady must struggle to control the constant underlying presence of the bloodlust, which at times overwhelms him. Children of the Vampire is also a story of true evil, as Dracula toys with, tortures, and murders his victims.

Each character in the novel is well drawn, compelling, and each evolves over the course of the story, changing sometimes for the better and sometimes for the worse.

But the strongest element is the plot. Kalogridis skillfully weaves her narrative with Stoker's, adding new layers of resonance to the story and amazingly, providing us with surprise after surprise in territory that we all know — or we all think we know — very well. The result is a brilliant, terrifying, compelling story that provides a significant addition to this fascinating myth.

— Jeanne Cavelos

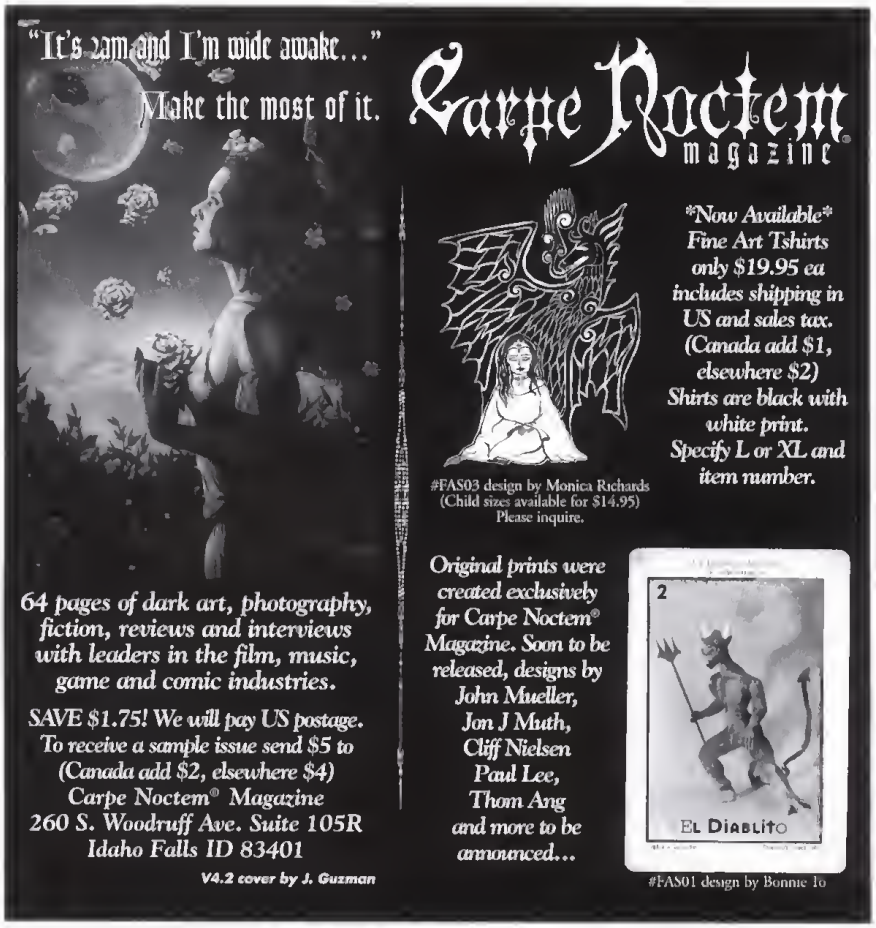
FOLKROOTS

Continued from page 29

Joseph Southall, Byam Shaw, and the artists of the Arts & Crafts movement. Burne-Jones had his own flamboyant mid-life love affair, with the fiery Greek sculptor Maria Zambaco — her striking face and long dark hair can be seen in many of his best paintings. In the end, Burne-Jones reneged on his vow to leave his marriage and returned to his wife, while the angry, heartbroken Maria was left threatening to drown herself. There is evidence to suggest that his wife, Georgiana, was herself in love with William Morris (and Morris with her)–but these two, despite Bohemianism lifestyles, had been raised with high Victorian ideals. Faithful Georgie remained at her husband's side, enduring Zambaco and her husband's penchant for pretty young women during his later years; Morris remained with Janey, bound by convention, their children, and a mutual affection that had survived many years of trial.

Perhaps it is the drama of these entwined lives, as much as the art itself, that now attracts so many of us; writers love a good story after all. But I think it is also significant that late–20th-century fantasists and late–19th-century Pre-Raphaelites tend to hold certain things in common: a love for myth and mysticism, for Celtic legends and epic romance, and a taste for magic. There is magic in the Arthurian paintings of Burne-Jones, and the works of his "Briar Rose" series (based on the Sleeping Beauty fairy tale). There is magic in Rossetti's pensive women, in Waterhouse's mad Ophelia, in Hunt's entrapped Lady of Shalott. There is magic in Morris' utopian fantasy novels, now classics of our field. In fantasy, as in Pre-Raphaelite art, we find a deep nostalgia for the landscapes of the rural past — in the rolling Shires of Middle Earth, the island villages of Earthsea, the unspoiled forests of Narnia, Islandia and Mythago Wood. As editor Patrick Nielsen Hayden has pointed out, it is probably no accident that the explosive popularity of Tolkien's books and the susequent birth of the modern fantasy genre occurred at the same time as the growth of the modern ecology movement. In an age of urban expansion and aggressive suburban development, many of us long for simple green fields, clear waters and the timeless beauty of winding woodland trails — a hunger fed by journeys through the untamed woods of fantasy. One hundred years ago, William Morris watched as his beloved English countryside disappeared under rapid industrialization; his art and politics express an impassioned appeal for a rural way of life–for a return to an idyllic, chivalric medieval past that had never been.

With mythic and magical imagery evident in so much Pre-Raphaelite art, it should come as no surprise that a number of Victorian fantasy writers were connected to the circle.







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George Macdonald, the author of *The Light Princess* and other classic fairy tales, was Georgiana Burne-Jones's father; Rudyard Kipling, author of *The Jungle Book* and *Puck of Pook's Hill*, was her nephew. Ford Maddox Ford, grandson of Pre-Raphaelite painter Ford Maddox Brown, began his career writing fairy tales. E. Nesbit, author of *The Enchanted Castle* and other ground-breaking children's fantasies, was niece to Dante Gabriel Rossetti — and to Christina Rossetti, whose fantasy poem *Goblin Market* is a Victorian classic. Lewis Carroll, William Allingham, Lawrence Houseman and many other writers of magical poetry and prose were part of the wider Pre-Raphaelite circle...and even John Ruskin tried his hand at fairy tales (*King of the Golden River*).

One final link joins modern fantasists with the unconventional painters and poets who lived and loved and worked and dreamed one hundred years before us. Like the early Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood (before the tides of fashion turned in their favor), fantasists must work outside the approval of the art establishment. Fantasists use themes that are once again considered beneath the notice of serious artists: myth, magic, fairy tales, and stories unabashedly Romantic. The Pre-Raphaelite artists worked in forms derided as craft or decoration, not high art: ceramics, weaving, embroidery, jewelry making, furniture and book design — just as today we work in forms that are also rarely considered high art: genre fiction, children's fiction, book illustration and comics.

The Pre-Raphaelites ignored the conventions of their day, and the critics quick to dismiss them. They refused to change their vision to suit the times — they changed the world around them instead. Perhaps those "tiles around the chimney piece and hangings that keep out the draft"may seem like small, inconsequential ways of going about changing the world...and yet these things still influence the art, the dreams, the daily lives of men and women more than one hundred years later. The Pre-Raphaelite vision is still alive to inspire many of us today. Perhaps some day we'll be able to say the same about the best of the mythical art and fiction created in our own century. In the meantime, we can take heart from the beautiful work of the Pre-Raphaelites — from those seven original rebellious young men, from the men and women who followed them, and all steadfast, visionary souls who have walked this road before us.

BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS: *Goblin Market* by Christina Rossetti, *The Well at the World's End* by William Morris, the Arthurian poetry of Tennyson, the fairy tales of George Macdonald and Oscar Wilde. For fiction about the Pre-Raphaelites, try *Neighboring Lives* by Thomas Disch and Charles Naylor, an excellent historical novel set in Chelsea during Rossetti's time. For nonfiction, see the recommendations at the end of the Gallery column. ❧

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BALKAN SEIGE

Continued from page 38

The ghosts in the room are silent, unmoving, the ragged gasps of the sniper's breath the only sound. The pain in her arm is reaching her now, making it hard to hold the gun steady. She waits for him to beg her to stop, to spare his life, but he is silent, watching her.

She lowers the gun. Something in his eyes; she looks around the room. The ghosts are crowded thickly here—an aged centurion in breastplate and helmet, a Russian soldier clutching his rifle, other faces, pressed close, anxious, waiting, their faces echoing the look she sees in the sniper's eyes. A calmness and acceptance, a certainty that only death awaits, inevitable as war's alarm.

She wonders how her face looks, lifts the gun and hears the sniper gasp, sees him tense for the bullet. His fear is enough. She takes the gun in her right arm and throws it out the window, waits till she hears the sound of it clatter on the street below. "You can't have me."

The fighting has moved directly under the window. If the ghosts have heard her, they give no sign. Someone is yelling down on the street, harsh repeated commands, "Go, go, go, go." The sniper still huddles in the corner, confused and somehow disappointed. She ignores him and walks carefully to the window. The ghosts part silently to let her pass.

She watches the battle as it progresses. The Serbs advance for a while, but then are pushed back as the government forces are alerted to their presence. Others battle there as well, Greeks against Illyrians, Turks against jackbooted Slavs, wild-eyed Arabs stalking heretic Christians; the battles all mesh into one, formless, without goal or purpose, without beginning or end.

At some point the sniper comes to stand beside her. Something in his eyes tells her that he can see it too, the ghostly battle below, echoed each generation. She helps him pull the glass from his leg, and he tears his shirt to make bandages for them both. The ghosts have drifted off one by one until at last they are alone. By evening the battle has moved on and she leaves him there, neither speaking a word.

The city is silent in the dimming light. A wind is blowing off of the mountain, carrying away the smell of smoke, bringing with it the hint of cool trees and peaceful slopes. She picks her way past burned cars, abandoned trucks, bodies also abandoned where they fell. The city seems distant, unreal. She heads for her apartment, then stops herself. She needs food, medical attention, and she needs to leave. She turns toward the UN garrison, thinking perhaps they are not cowards after all. Perhaps the only answer to madness is refusing to participate.

At least, she knows, they will have food. ❧

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Contributors

LOUISE COOPER WAS BORN NEAR LONdon and currently resides in the Vale of Evesham, sort of sandwiched between the Cotswold hills and the Malvern hills, with Stratford-upon-Avon about ten miles away. Louise loves gardening, cooking and her cat, Spike. Spike believes laps were invented for him to sit on, especially when the owner is trying to type, and w/p screen cursors are something to be stalked and thoroughly killed. Workwise, Louise has just completed a sequel to her children's novel, *Daughters of Storms*, for Hodder; its title is *The Dark-Caller*. Her last completed adult novel was *Sacrament of Night*, a one-off, to be published in the UK by Headline, September 1997. She is now finishing another children's book, this time for Hamish Hamilton/ Puffin; *StormGhost*, a supernatural adventure set in Cornwall and concerning a long-ago lifeboat disaster. Future projects include an adult novel; *Our Lady of the Snow*, which has some parallels with 18-century Imperial Russia though with, of course, her inevitable darkly supernatural slant.

Noreen Doyle, disguised as a humble temporary clerk, is in reality a graduate student specializing in ancient Egyptian boats. She has facilitated her disguise by indulging in such non-archaeological activities as installing a rock garden, attending auctions, and writing science fiction and fantasy. Her first story, inspired by the Egyptian Book of the Dead, appeared in the February 1995 issue of *Realms of Fantasy*. She lives in a small town in Maine, where she does not attend the historical society.

David Phalen lives in Kansas with his wife and three young daughters, from whom he shamelessly steals story ideas. The original idea behind "Teeth" came from his oldest daughter's question about what happens if the tooth fairy comes to your room and finds out you haven't lost any teeth. Phalen's stories have previously appeared in *Writers of the Future, Century,* and *Analog*. He is currently at work on his first novel.

Russell William Asplund was born in Canada, but raised in Utah, where he currently lives with his wife and four children. He works as a multimedia programmer and is a partner in a small software company called Candesa Interactive. In his spare time he collects music, reads far too many books, and tries to find time to write. Russell was first place winner in the Writers of the Future contest, and has stories coming up in Ellen Datlow and Terri Windling's fairy tale anthology *Silver Birch, Silver Moon* and in *Marion Zimmer Bradley's Fantasy Magazine.*



Terri Windling



David Beck

DAVID BECK HAS PRODUCED TWELVE paintings for *Realms of Fantasy* and *Science Fiction Age* in the past few years. He is currently working on the 25th anniversary of Universal Picture Theme Parks. In the past year he also worked on *Dragonheart* through Hasbro, Inc., as well as Projects for *U.S. News and World Report*, Boy Scouts of America, NFL Properties and Warner Brother Pictures. He won awards at the annual exhibition of the Society of Illustrators and *Step-by-Step Graphics Magazine*. The Grateful Dead own thirteen or more of his pieces.

Terri Windling is a writer and painter who works extensively with myth and fairy tale themes. She is also a five-time winner of the World Fantasy Award for her editorial work, which includes the annual *Year's Best Fantasy & Horror Collection* (co-edited with Ellen Datlow, St. Martin's Press) and many other anthologies and book series. She divides her time between homes in Devon, England and Tuscon, Arizona.

Janet Aulisio is hard at work on a personal series of paintings, in addition to her commissioned work for most of the SF field's major magazines.

Greg Carter completed his education at Florida State University in 1985. Unbound by the chains of academia, he took his ensemble of freaks, mutants and misfits on the road, showing them in galleries around the southeast. He now resides in Raleigh with his wife Grace, and their two kids, Sonja and Beckett. Greg has found a new medium, the digital arena, the cyber sideshow. He has displayed his images extensively in cyber culture fringe paper (*Axcess, Plazm, Juice, boing,boing*) and digital publications as well as on-line. All of his computer images have been created on Power Mac or the Quadra series use Adobe Photostop. Greg says his works all explore the expressionist premise that the civility of any social interaction *is a skin tight veneer that is easily scratched, revealing a less than pleasant true nature.*

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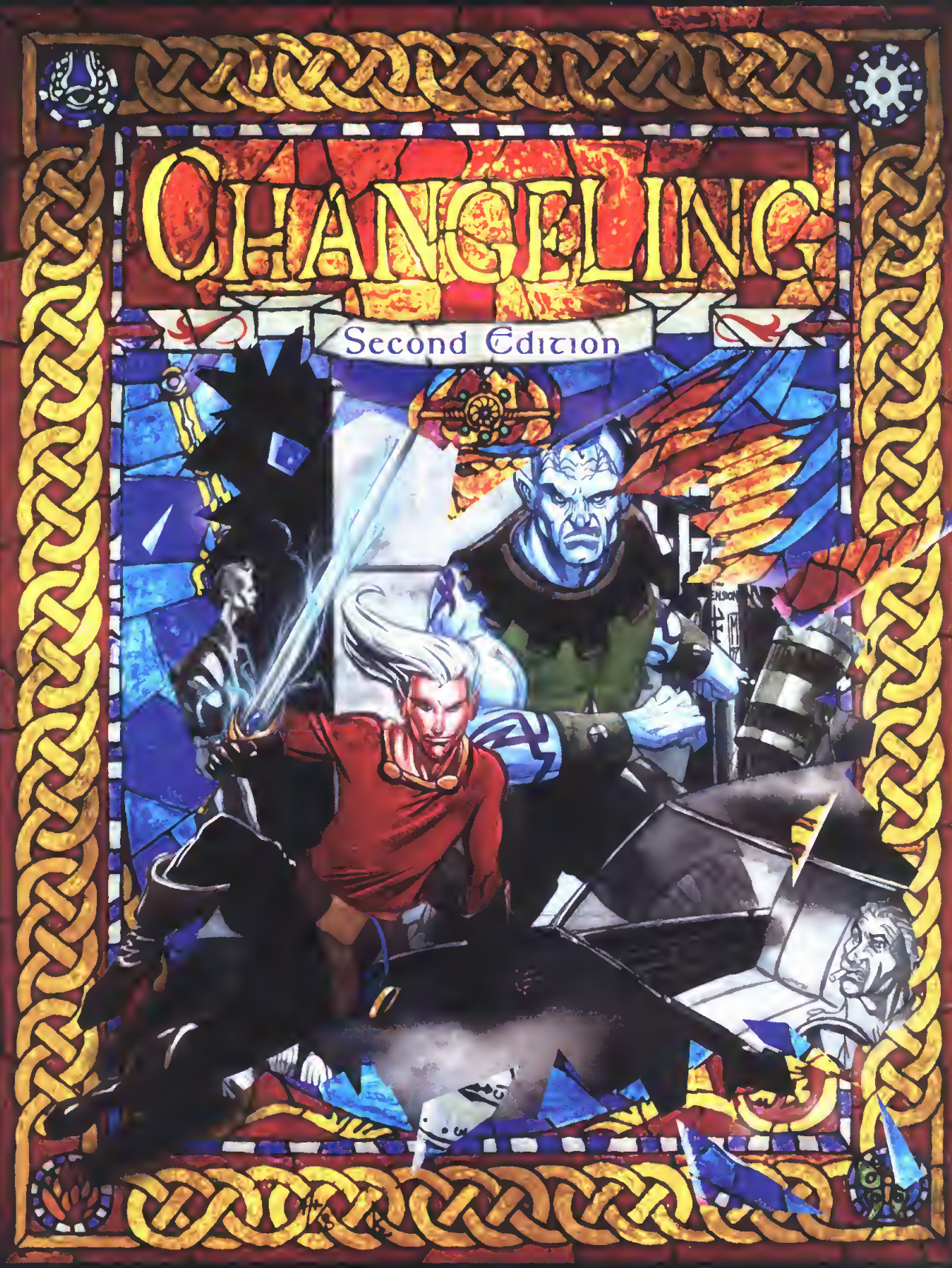
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